風の聖痕（スティグマ） 4

―瑠璃色の残影―

それが、視界に飛び込んできた瞬間、八神和麻（やがみかずま）の意識から、それ以外のすべてが消滅（しょうめつ）した。無意識の内に足を踏み出し、乞（こ）い求めるように手を差し出す。

二度と会えないはずの少女が、そこにいた。あの時の姿、そのままに。

「……翠（ツオイ）、鈴（リン）……」

和麻の唇（くちびる）が、かすれた呟（つぶや）きを漏（も）らした。

――新宿で夜毎（よごと）のように行われている術者（じゅつしゃ）らしき若者たちのストリートファイト。その噂（うわさ）の真偽（しんぎ）を追い、その裏（うら）にいる人物を探る和麻。しかし、世界最強の風（ふう）術師（じゅつし）は、一人の少女の出現に激（はげ）しく動揺（どうよう）するのだった。

果たして彼女は、あの翠鈴なのか!?

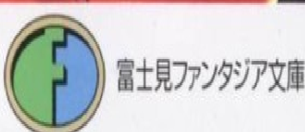
風が哭（な）くハイパー・エレメント・アクション。衝撃のシリーズ第４弾！

風の聖痕（スティグマ） 4

―瑠璃色の残影―

山門敬弘

イラスト　納都花丸



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風の聖痕（スティグマ）4
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風の聖痕（スティグマ） 4
—瑠璃色の残影—
「なんだお前、まさか霧香に対抗意識持ってるのか？」
「そ、そんなんじゃないわよっ!」
綾乃は、拗ねの入った目で和麻を見上げた。
少女は、和麻を一心に見つめていた。
潤んだ瞳が今にも泣き崩れそうに揺れている。


「──ああ、そうか。」
和麻は掌を打ち合わせた。
心の中の思いを、
そのまま口にしてることも
気づかないまま。
「翠鈴の瞳は、碧だったな──」



登場人物紹介
八神和麻
KAZUMA YAGAMI
本名、神凪和麻。神凪家の宗家に生まれながら炎を操る力を持たなかったため、一族を追放された。四年間の海外修業を経て風術師として帰国。いい加減に見えるけど、風の精霊王と契約をした世界唯一の契約者〈コントラクター〉。なにげに世界最強の風術師。22歳
神凪 煉
REN KANNAGI
和麻の弟。炎術師としては、未開発ながらも類い希な能力を持つ。ぶっ飛んだ神凪家において数少ない常識人。兄を無条件で信頼し尊敬している。切ない恋を経験し少しだけ男らしくなってきたが、〈弟属性〉は未だ無敵の12歳。この度中学生になりました
神凪綾乃
AYANO KANNAGI
神凪家宗主の娘で和麻の再従姉妹。精霊王の加護の証〈炎雷覇〉の現所有者。その容姿と物腰（外交用）でかなりの人気を集めるが、理想が高すぎるため未だ彼氏がいない。以前とは別人のように強くなって帰ってきた和麻が、何故かちょっと気になるこの頃。16歳
久遠七瀬
NANASE KUDOU
綾乃の親友にしてクラスメイト１号。陸上部に所属のエースで、そのボーイッシュな容姿と言動で、女子生徒の人気を集めている。綾乃と和麻の関係を、生暖かい目で見守っている。また綾乃の力を知る数少ない一般人である
篠宮由香里
YUKARI SHINOMIYA
綾乃の親友にしてクラスメイト２号。生徒会に所属。綾乃も恐れる謎の情報網を持っている。また物事を面白くすることに関しては、悪魔的な才能を発揮。その才能は、主に綾乃をからかうのに発揮される

Chapter 1 - A certain cameraman's day

Part 1

"Ugh, why are you always like that?"
"Don't say vague words such as *like that*. Was there a problem?"
"A big one, you baka! You're always, always forcing everything on me! To think that just by standing there you get paid, don't you think of apologizing to the diligent working people?"
"Not at all."
"You low-life scoundreeeeeell!"
The girl's angry roar, rumbled in a big way.
It happened during the evening, in front of the Shinjuku Station. The lovely girl's scream, became the focal point for the people passing through.
"Ah."
Belatedly realizing she became the target of attention, the girl's face became colored with shame.
"You're the center of attention."
The man who seemed to accompany her, nonchalantly informed her. For a second time the girl frowned but being careful of the surroundings this time, she said in a whisper.
"Who- whose fault is it?"
"It's yours, yours, yours. Don't shift the responsibility."
"Uuu.......a- anyway, we're changing the place."
The girl took the man's hand and left that place behind as if running.
Without being particularly unusual, a commonplace act found anywhere.
But this was the beginning of everything.

"Go- good grief......I was so embarrassed."
While out of breath because of the powerful sprint, the girl glared at the man standing next to her.
The man, while running the same distance at the same speed, with no indication of heavy breath, he replied calmly.
"I already told you it was your fault. Don't complain to me."
"A- aren't you in the wrong for not working seriously?"
In short, it was like that.
The girl's name was Kannagi Ayano. The man's name was Yagami Kazuma.
Their occupation is to exorcise evil and protect the world from harm.
As the man's motto was *earn money with ease*, for people that possess first class battle abilities like Ayano, whom he met during work, he doesn't hesitate to bear the stigma of a salary thief.
That's what happened this time. Without literally raising a finger Kazuma watched over Ayano like a sightseer frivolously ridiculing the seriously fighting Ayano.

Being too serious and having pride towards herself as a practitioner, Ayano couldn't forgive Kazuma's attitude.
"J- just stop it already you low-life scoundrel!!!"
Which means her anger exploded in the already familiar way.
What happened until now can be called an ordinary scene. But -
"That's no good, making your woman work while you have it easy, such a windward man is no good."
"Eh?"
Called out from an unexpected direction, Ayano frowned with a twitch. Turning her face around, a strange man before his twenties, with a sloppy smile, approached grinning.
"Forget about that useless man and come with me. I'll make you happy."
.....What, a flirt.....
Ayano instantly lost her interest for the man. Ignoring him, she turned to where Kazuma was. But - no one was there.
Watching around even more, the *useless man* was putting a coin into a vending machine.
"Hey.", said Ayano in a crushed to death tone.
But even so, without changing his facial expression Kazuma took a sip of the Oolong tea, enjoyed the cold liquid reaching his neck, sampled its flavor in full and finally answered.
"......What?"
"It's not *.......what?* is it!? Why, when I'm being involved with a left-over inferior man, are you ignoring it without taking any sort of position!?"
"Don't say that. The job is already finished, so I don't think I have any obligation to protect you."
In spite of absolutely not protecting her during the job, Kazuma said so, shamelessly.
Of course, Ayano can't be deceived with those words.
"This has nothing to do with work. Every man had the duty to protect the girl he's with at the same time!"
"I think that sort of sexual discrimination has no logic. To begin with, one or two dozen of skirt-chasers makes no difference for you right?"
"That's why I told you that's not it! With the technique of escorting a young woman - any man of caliber should care about that!"
"That caliber should be fine even without asking."
While arguing noisily both of them naturally took their leave.
The skirt chaser saw them off dumbfounded, but after finally noticing something he shouted with grim eyes.
"W- wait you!!"
".........."
".........."
Stopping at the same time, both turned around with bored expressions.
"Why couldn't he watch us off quietly?"
"He's really an idiot that can't read the atmosphere."

"You....you!!"
Completely made fun of, the man's face flushed bright red. Of course, not being ashamed because he doesn't know his standing.
Gripping his fists, the man drew closer with a rough gait. No matter how you look at it, he wasn't in the disposition to flirt with Ayano anymore.
"Really......"
Letting out a bothersome sigh, Kazuma took a step forward. It seems he intended to become the man's opponent but from that figure, standing there with one Oolong tea can in his hand, no tension can be felt.
"You should pick your partner a little better. It's impossible to get this woman through flirting you know?"
".........What does that mean?"
At his tone that was definitely not praising her, while her temples were twitching, Ayano pressed a question.
Kazuma answered with nonchalantly.
"It means that your behavior is firm, that you're a very level-headed Ojou-sama."
"............"
With a pure white look, Ayano stared at Kazuma very long.
"Say that again while looking into my eyes."
"Sorry, that's impossible."
An immediate reply. Furthermore, he adverted his eyes making an unnatural face.
"Kazuma?"
With a sweet smile but while her temple veins were pulsing Ayano grabbed Kazuma's collar.
She pulled Kazuma closer with a superhuman strength her slender arms didn't seem capable of and glared at him point blank, their faces very close.
No matter how those two think about it, that was from the start nothing more but a lover's quarrel.
What's more, they didn't even pay attention to the existence of the man drawing closer.
His very small pride stepped over, the skirt chaser's face was warped with anger.
"Yoooooooouuuuu!!"
Glaring at the two huddling closer preparing to kiss, the man struck.
But, just before the attack reached, Kazuma gently pushed Ayano aside and retreated himself, using that recoil.
The man's fist and then his body slipped through the space between those two.
First his fist and then his upper body and then the lower half of his body went through.
Nonchalantly, with his foot left in place, Kazuma swiped the man's feet.
"Gee!?"

Unable to defend, the man lively fell down. And soundlessly meeting him half-way, using the pointed end of his tiptoe, Kazuma kicked the man's jaw.
" - gh!"
Raising a voiceless shriek, he fell flat, the white of his eyes showing.
Without even making sure of the conclusion, Kazuma turned back to Ayano.
"Well, let's go."
"Yeah."
Heartless, the two started walking leaving the fainted man as it is. But, after advancing a few steps, Kazuma suddenly stopped.
"What happened?"
Without answering Ayano, Kazuma turned back unusually slow. Ayano too, followed his gaze, and looked at the same thing he was.
" - Why?"
Ayano inclined her head a little. There's no mistake about it, Kazuma's kick shot the lights out of the man's jaw.
That man's cranium and his brain were violently shaken inside and he wouldn't be conscious for at least an hour.
"Hmmm - "
Icily looking at the man that was recovering with an unusual speed, Kazuma pushed out his Oolong tea to Ayano.
"Hold it."
"Ah, yeah," nodding obediently Ayano took the can.
Fleetingly looking at the can in her hand, for some reason her cheeks were dyed red.
"Y- You....u...."
Looking at Ayano, although staggering, the man got up. Admirably, his sturdiness is clearly exceeding his intellect.
"You made me so angry.......I won't go easy on you - I'll kill you!"
While spouting words with no ingenuity, the man was rapidly recovering. The unfocused pupil, was glaring at Kazuma now.
" - Raah!"
Raising a strange voice, the man started running towards Kazuma. He was fast.
The movement excluding any technique based only on force and the explosive power was closer to that of a beast.
Reaching top speed in just three steps, he brandished his hardened fists.
"Dieeee!"
The fist pushed out in a straight line. Kazuma handled that with a empty handed movement, parrying by rotating. Simultaneously seizing the opponent's arm, making sure to catch his fingertips, he lightly overturned the opponent's wrist.
Only by that movement, the man's body flew in mid-air. And then, with no sign of effort put into it, he was blown off with extreme force.
By seizing a linear motion thrust with a circular one is swallowed up and the center of gravity crumbles.

This is a technique that is called Aiki in Japan and China or Hapki in Korea.
By utilizing the opponent's power, a larger amount of power can be controlled with a smaller one - that is the advantage of this power but -

- bekiii! -
But even so, how much power did that man's attack have, to be flung away with enough force to break the roadside trees he crashed into.
Kazuma looked down in silence at the man that tumbled from the nearby crashed trees. There is no negligence in those eyes. It was an expression convinced that he will definitely get up.
"Heh......hehehehehehe.....there's no use......"
As he thought, the man showed no sign of damage.
"On the me right now, human attacks don't work!"
While screaming the man took off his jumper. That body dressed in a T-shirt is skinny. But -
"Koooo......"
Together with the exhalation, the thin body rapidly grew thicker.
The over-sized T-shirt was pushed and stretched by the inflating body.
"Ooaaaa!!"
It was torn off when its limit crossed-over.
".....Is this what you call *pump up*?" asked Ayano, lacking a sense of reality.
By repeating muscle contraction, by means of pumping large quantities of blood containing oxygen, the muscles will dramatically expand - there certainly is such a technique. But still -
"Well - did the human muscle fiber extend this much?" Kazuma returned with a bitter smile.
Practically, when seeing this you have no choice but to laugh. The man's transformation reached the limit of metamorphosis.
The thickness of his arms, the width of his chest, all his muscles, without exaggerating, swelled up more than three times.
The body, neglected because of laziness, suddenly evolved to the utmost limits of a well trained bodybuilder.
"Ku ku ku ku ....."
Expressing a full smile, the man inserted power in his muscles. The body that increased its thickness to the limit became even wider.
"You'll die you know? There's no one who survived after seeing this body!"
".........."
With sober eyes Kazuma inspected the surroundings. It was obvious but they became the target of attention for many pedestrians crossing in front of the Shijuku station.
"This is a rough estimate but a hundred people are watching you. Do you intend to kill them all?"
"Shut- shut-up!"
Since his cool line was calmly retorted, the man shouted with a red face.
"Don't talk down on me! Let's go!!"

Together with his voice, the man's figure disappeared. That's what it must have looked like through the eyes of ordinary men.
Much faster than the first charge, with a speed that obviously exceeds what a man can achieve, he dashed.
The fist pushed out a second time and Kazuma dealt with it using the same circular motion.
But, whether Aiki or Hapki, although it appears like a supernatural movement for the untrained eyes, the principle is still the same.
Even using the principle of leverage, if the opponent's power is bigger, there won't be any effect.
The man's physical strength, drastically transcended the human limits. Although Kazuma had a far better posture, even using his whole energy, he couldn't change the thrust's trajectory.
As soon as he noticed that, he moved. Diagonally stepping ahead, he moved his body from the trajectory and going even further, he went around the man's back.
The powerful fist was dodged and his slovenly stance was destroyed, leaving his back defenseless. Placing his foot on the back of the knee, Kazuma stepped on it with all his strength.
With a crumbling sound, the knee's ligament broke. But still he mercilessly stepped on it, beating the man's knee to the ground. The white tiles spread on the ground broke at the same time with the kneecap.
"Hikyaaa!"
His knee completely destroyed, the man screamed with intense pain. Maybe because of the dull sound made by the knee, his upper body arched with force to watch for Kazuma behind him.
Using the foot he broke the knee with as a pivot, Kazuma raised his elbow overhead.
The cranium that was approaching from the opposite side was attacked by Kazuma's elbow that seemed to bore a hole in it.
The <<Ki>> pumped into the cranium via that extremely violent power blow penetrated his brain and came out through the forehead.
The man's body convulsed, then fell down like a doll with broken strings and was silent.
As expected, he didn't get up this time.
"Many thanks."
"Ah, I pointlessly used my physical strength."
At Ayano's thankful words, Kazuma made a sluggish reply.
Although it was minor, because he exercised he felt thirsty and extended his hand to Ayano.
"Oolong tea."
Kazuma carelessly stretched his hand but the next second he turned his entire body around.
He noticed that Ayano's hand was empty.
"My Oolong tea?"

Cross-examined by Kazuma, Ayano's cheeks lightly colored and smiled while showing her tongue.



"I drank it."
"Aah!?"
Extremely childish, Kazuma's eyes peeled openly angry.
"You, don't behave selfishly with the social standing of a rich woman! Return my Oolong tea!"
".....Still, don't you think that it's unsightly......" Ayano murmured, dejected by the excessive cheapness.
Rare nowadays, she was full of disappointment.
"Shut up. I can't stand when other people take my stuff."
"Well, leaving that aside...."
Considerably displeased, Ayano forcefully changed the topic.
"What do we do with this?"
In front of her eyes, the fallen flirty man became a mere shadow of its former self.
His flesh deflated and his body returned to the modest former self.
No, it didn't just return. Even after returning to the same shape, the muscles' atrophy didn't stop.
Thoroughly endless, as if air slipped out of it, the man's body shrunk until it turned into a creature of only skin and bone.
"Is this...the backlash of power? But he doesn't seem dead."
"Well then."
"Who on earth was this guy?"
Kazuma shrugs his shoulders but doesn't answer. Different from Ayano, tilting her head in wonder, he does not seem to have any sort of interest towards it.
Taking an attitude with no sense of responsibility, Ayano stares at Kazuma including blame.
"You'll just ignore it?"
"It doesn't concern me. Well, as for the obligation I have as a citizen, shall I inform the police?"
Taking out his cellphone, he pressed the buttons. But, contrary to his words he didn't press 119.
"Kirika? There is knocked down half naked suspicious person at the south entrance of Shinjuku. If you catch it, you may hear something interesting. Bye."
Without waiting for the other side to reply, he one-sidedly informed her about the business and closed the phone.
Ayano looked up at Kazuma with a stunned expression.
"How to say this, you can't be kind no matter the circumstance?"
She knew who he contacted. That's someone she definitely didn't like but she couldn't help but feel pity for Kirika.
But, Kazuma replied very naturally.
"It's fine because it's Kirika."

A casual tone full of trust. That careless contact, unkind but without omitting crucial steps, recognizing the signs of Kazuma's confidence in *if it's Kirika, that's enough*, for some reason Ayano felt discomfort.
"Hmmm, is Tachibana such a capable police officer?"
Not in other areas - without using words just by placing accent, Ayano spit out the thorny words.
Tachibana Kirika is the name of the person Kazuma called. Her rank is police superintendent. She serves as the Chief of the Special Investigation Unit, the institution dealing with expelling evil spirits.
It would be better not saying this but, as a matter of fact, this organization is made of only puny abilities.
Especially their battle capabilities were really meager. So after discovering the devilishness to be defeated, they leave the actual *defeating* to the big guns - the Kannagi Clan.
And so, the trust Kazuma was placing on Kirika seemed to be related to police business but -
"Aa, ahhh, Kirika is really capable *even* as a government worker."
It appears that Kazuma was trusting Kirika as a practitioner. Answering her question that was supposed to be mean earnestly made Ayano's face become even more grim.
"You meant very capable as a practitioner?"
"Yes, isn't she a top class Onmyoji?"
"But isn't that person from one of Tachibana's branch families?"
Even if it is an Onmyoji name, it belongs after all to one of the branch families. To say nothing of the do-nothing-job as a police chief.
In front of Ayano who was having such warped thoughts, Kazuma shamelessly praised another woman.
"Because she was more capable than the branch family, she was gotten rid of to Tokyo MPD's Special Investigation Unit as some sort of exile."
"............Really?"
"Especially for her, because she adopted fairly unprincipled different style techniques, they had various reasons for punishment. But, at the very least now there isn't a single person from the Tachibana more capable than her."
"Hmm, really?"
Seeming really displeased, Ayano made agreeable responses in short sentences with no intonation.
Incompletely understanding her obvious *I'm angry* attitude, Kazuma looked into Ayano's face.
"What happened?"
"Nothing!"
Shouting angrily, Ayano turned her face away. Watching her reaction, Kazuma's lips curved as if finally noticing something.
"What's up with you, don't tell you have a sense of rivalry towards Kirika?"
"I- it's not like that!"

That was an almost reflex answer but it was definitely not a lie. The one Ayano was fussing over was not Kirika.

More than that woman, I was, by far...

She looked up to Kazuma peevishly.

As for Ayano, she was conceited about the fact that Kazuma was her partner. More than Kirika, she was far more helpful. She fought for the sake of Kazuma.

"It's fine because it's Ayano."

He never told her such words, not even once.

He doesn't trust in her. Perhaps he doesn't even have confidence in her.

Am I that useless?

It seems she'll forever be nothing more but an unskilled half-share. Thinking like that, she becomes unbearably anxious.

Even so, this man never says what she wants to hear and only spouts worthless bullshit with a frivolous laugh.

"It's fine. In other areas it's out of the question but as a practitioner you won't loose. When exchanging blows you're absolutely stronger." - Like that.

At the expressively well timed reply, Ayano is helplessly enraged.

"That's not a follow-up! You baka! Just die!"

Kazuma stares at Ayano's fit of anger really, really happy.

Since before the trust comment, for the sake of enjoying himself with Ayano's reactions, Kazuma takes careful aim with his words and before she will realize it, many of these incidents will happen.

Part 2

One ordinary day after school.

One section of the practice ground was filled with a silence full of tension. Everyone was neglecting their practice and while holding a hand to their mouths, their gazes were concentrating to one point.

Before their eyes...was that girl's figure. Elatedly reacting to the gaze that was already turned into physical pressure, she was standing there with a clear facial expression.

Someone gulped - strangely that sound clearly reached her ears. As if that was a signal, the girl lightly kicked the earth's surface and started running. Her route drew a light arc, a forward obliqueness, aiming at the bar the same height as her stature.

Stepping on her left foot, the girl was released from the restraints of gravity. Her bent chest aiming the sky, her slender limbs danced in midair.

"Oooh...."

While watching over the excited onlookers, the girl's head, then her beautiful arched body and her long stretched legs, passed above the bar.

The posture of a perfect jump. The body that jumped over the bar was once more caught by gravity but that one moment was beautiful.

With a light sound, the girl's body was buried in the mattress. Her limbs spread in abandon, overhead the bar was still, expressing the high success of the jump.
"........."
A moment of silence. And then - an explosion of applause and cheers.
"Veeeery goood! A new record!"
"Kudo-senpai is great!"
"Nanase, I love you!"
In the middle of the bursting cheers, the girl - Kudo Nanase slowly got up.
Not really exposing her emotions, it didn't look as if she sympathized with the uproar.
Looking up at the bar overhead, her lips faintly raised. That was all the joy she displayed for breaking a new record.
Nanase Kudo - a beautiful girl with androgynous features and straight short-cut hair.
Always calm, with quick movements and not an easy going tone like most girls and yet not boyish, she was enjoying an overwhelming popularity between girls her age - that's why, this kind of scene was a daily occurrence.
"Senpai, please use this!"
A first year, winning through a violent competition presented Nanase, descending from the mattress a towel.
"Ah, thank you."
Nanase accepted it with a small smile. She returned it after lightly whipping off her sweat.
"Haa..."
Inhaling with yearning her senpai's perspiration, the girl embraced the towel with an ecstatic expression. The others in the big crowd, having been outwitted, glared at the girl with murder in their eyes.
Somewhere close to the development of the all-girl's school-like act -
"........"
Clearly separating herself from that naive society, with a severe facial expression, Nanase looked in the way of the tennis court.
She glared at the blackish shadow clinging to the fence with a violent repugnance.
"Is he here again?"
"Senpai?"
A girl's voice asked a question in a surprised tone. Noticing that, Nanase looked at the girl and showed a harmless smile.
"Nothing important. Just, you know?"
While answering, she gently brushed the girl's head in a casual manner. It as an action with no significance in particular but -
".........uu?"
With a scream that didn't seem to reach the surroundings, the girl in question fell to the ground with a swoon face.
".....What happened?"

"No- no......nothing....."

With a red face and clouded eyes, as if fever made her delirious, the girl slowly shook her head.

"I see. Then, take care."

Not really thinking about it, Nanase started walking - aiming at the tennis court.

The moment she turned to it, she had already forgotten the conversation with the girl. She was concentrating on the suspicious figure clinging to the tennis court's fence.

With a cool expression, totally different from the one pointed at the girl before, unforgiving, as if giving a sentence.

"Hey, he's still coming?"

A second year in the tennis club, Sughino Mie murmured so, displeased from the bottom of her heart. Before her eyes, sticking to the tennis court's fence, a short and fat shadow was peeking.

Just by looking, he was a suspicious man.

Setting up his digital camera, that figure taking snapshots of the girls' appearance, no other word described him better than *degenerate*.

If this man wasn't a pupil of Seiryou Academy, they would definitely call the police. Or perhaps, there are a lot of people who think they should call the police nevertheless.

Utsumi Kousuke.

That is this man's name. He is a second year but his results were so poor it was a miracle he managed to promote.

His facial features resemble a frog. His whole face is full of pimples, and he had a greasy sweat regardless of the season so his frog image is spot-on.

He belonged to the photography club but the subjects of his photos are just a step away from criminal or maybe already crossing over that line, only that kind of crap.

But even so, the perpetrator is claiming that this is art, although nobody believed him.

It's only natural. If one were to see the expression on his while taking pictures, there can be no place for misunderstanding.

The feeling of various dangers emitted from his blood-shot eyes gave the impression of a real sex-offender.

"As I thought, he's dangerous. Shouldn't we do something?"

"That's right, he's also scaring the first years....."

Weirdly stared at by Utsumi, pressing his shutter as if possessed, the girls were murmuring between themselves.

As if hiding behind her back the first years that have just joined the club, revealed their thought when looking for the first time at the ominous living creature.

"Se- senpai......what is *that*?"
"That's a pervert."
Mie immediately replied with no hesitation. That answer was something the first years, who didn't know the circumstance, could't comprehend but just because of that, their disgust and dread didn't soften.
"Can't you do something? Maybe calling the teacher..."
"Ah, yes.....he won't come...."
Staring at her kouhais, supplication clearly in their eyes, Mie's gaze wandered around, her face troubled.
No matter how suspicious he was, Utsumi was a pupil of this school. Moreover he had the pretext of being a member of the photography club.
That means, photographing as a club activity was for him very reasonable. They can't stop him from photographing just because his vulgar smile was eerie.
"No way..."
At that explanation, based on last year's events, the first year's crying faces were pitiable but nothing could be done at the present. Just when she was instructing them to give up, it happened -
"Huh....Kudo-san...?" murmured Mie, recognizing the girl walking behind Utsumi.
Simultaneously Utsumi also realized this and turned around, separating his eyes from the fence.
At that moment -
"Bukyaa!?"
A foot sole with no leniency stroke Utsumi's back of the head. The blow, more like stepping on him than trying to kick, forced Utsumi to strongly kiss the fence.
"Gyaa.....Gyaabii.....?"
To Utsumi's ears, as he was wordlessly screaming, reached a cold notice of conviction:
"How long did you think I would overlook your vulgar molestation, low-life?"
"Guugyaaa....bebii...."
Although Utsumi was trying to escape the restraint, his lazy, neglected body couldn't overcome the force of the foot trampling his head.
Vainly resisting, he was pressed down by the already doubled force. The flesh of his loosen face was squeezed through the mesh of the fence.
"Uuu......"
Because his already ugly face was distorted even more, all the girls in the tennis club simultaneously adverted their eyes.
A dozen seconds after - at the time everyone was starting to see his face really getting cut in the mesh, the girl - Nanase removed her leg.
The released Utsumi crouched holding his face. Crawling unsightly, from the gaps between his fingers he raised his eyes to Nanase.
"Hiii......please....stop the violence...."

A high shriek escaped. He tried to escape, stepping back as if crawling on his ass, but in the crowded place the fence blocked his escape route.
Fleetingly watching behind him, Utsumi's face became even more grim. On the other side of the fence, the girls belonging to the tennis club were watching him with grim eyes.
Being encouraged by Nanase's strong entrance, their eyes lost their fear for the ominous thing. Their looks filled with anger and flared up while their restraints towards the punishment of the insolent peeping demon broke.
In confusion, Utsumi started an explanation,
"Please, please wait. As a member of the photography club, for the sake of the year book photos, I - "
"Don't joke around!"
"Hiii -"
In a fit of rage the women kicked the fence and Utsumi fled that place as if tumbling.
But of course, Nanase is in that direction. This time his face, receiving a Yakuza Kick, was once again dragged in front of the girls.
"N- no, hey, listen....."
"Only lies, huh?" one of the girls shouted.
"How can you take such low angle photos for the year album? Everyone knows that you take dirty photos for the sake of your hobby!"
"That's true! That's true!"
"You rotten fat otaku shit! Diee!"
"It stinks! Don't get closer than a hundred meters!" several girls unanimously shouted.
Obviously there were some unjust accusations mixed in between but Utsumi was quiet.
Originally, except for taking pictures of girl's lower parts he is a timid person. While being surrounded by female students, it's impossible for him to object coherently.
No matter how unreasonable the verbal attacks he received, there was nothing to do but to put up with it in silence.
"Uuu, uuuu....."
"This should be fine, right?"
But a helping hand appeared from an unexpected place.
That was Nanase.
Naturally, she had the character of someone feeling refreshed after <<splitting the bamboo>>. She doesn't like the act of a large group ganging up on someone.
To say nothing of the girls' words which had already entered into a state of wild excitement and began to drift from the original point, changing into nothing but slander and ridicule.
Nanase disliked that development so she got back to the point.
It was just that, but -
"Ku- Kudo-san!"

With a face as if seeing Buddha from the depths of hell, Utsumi's eyes sparkled. It seems that he was convinced that Nanase became his ally.
"I - I knew you would understand! That's right, my photos are art. These women can't understand that!"
Bracing himself he stood up while talking non-stop. He didn't notice the cold anger filling Nanase's eyes.
"Aah, I understand! That's why you were angry. Because I didn't look at you and was taking pictures of this bunch. You don't have to worry, you're my most important subject. From now on, always - "
Perhaps Utsumi's character wasn't vulgar but simply stupid. If a neutral person were to stand there, he or she could only think that.
In the tennis girl's expressions, there was already no anger. What dwelt there was pity and dread. As if looking at a bomb timer decreasing each moment, they nervously observed Utsumi and Nanase.
And then -
GASYAN!
An ominous sound interrupted Utsumi's triumphant speech. His camera, rolling on the ground, was trampled upon with all her strength by Nanase.
"Aah, aaaaaaaaaa!?"
The expensive lens turned into shards of glass. Utsumi cried in a bitter voice.
"Wh- what are you doing!?"
Without answering, Nanase kicked the camera with her foot. Placing the camera with a crooked frame on the top of her foot, she used a half rotation to volley-kick and sent it flying.
The camera that flew with power crashed into the school building and smashed.
"Hiiiiii!"
With a pose similar to Munch's Scream, Utsumi shouted.
"Ah, ah, a..."
Leaking out as murmurs, as if his soul escaped his body, he looked up at Nanase in blank amazement.
A frozen gaze looked down on Utsumi.
"Hi, hiii......"
Nanase ordered the pale Utsumi with indifference.
"Get out of my sight!"
"Ah, waaa........waaaaa...."
Revealing a meaningless cry, Utsumi started running on all fours.
"Fucking trash! Just die!!"
"Don't ever come back!"
Showering his back with the tennis girls' boos, Utsumi ran away faster.
Nanase stared at that retreating figure thoroughly indifferent.

Part 3

Shit, just watch you bitches....

While placing desks one on top of the other behind the tennis club's room - in a perfectly blind spot from the front, Utsumi boiled in anger when thinking of those bitches that didn't understand his art.
After shooting them at great pains, they falsely accuse me of peeping and taking peeping films...then it's fine to answer your expectations right?
The insistence of repeating the failed argument over and over is filling his mind. That was nothing more than a pretext, but for him it didn't matter.
Even if someone were to deny it, for him that was the absolute truth and he found no reason to hesitate to respond to the *undeserved* persecution with *rightful* retribution.
"Yes, it got through!"
Utsumi, standing on top of the desks, reached the ventilation fan's frame. His body trembling in dark joy, he raised a small sound of joy.
He quietly inserted the small CCD camera in the small gap opened in the corner of the ventilation fan. On the monitor he was holding, silhouettes of girls in their underwear appeared clearly.
"How about this, did you realize.......?"
Without realizing, while smiling simple-mindedly watching the girls changing clothes, a naturally scornful smile appeared on his face.
While video recording the defenseless silhouettes of the people that insulted him, he was intoxicated by his own sense on superiority as if he could decide their fates.
"I won't be satisfied by just this. I'll leak your pictures on the net. With no censorship. Hyahahahaha!"
Of course, he will spread the video address inside the school. Intoxicated with sleazy delusions, in a sense, Utsumi was getting the hang of being a man.
Making the gap and plunging the camera to the extent of warping the secret ventilation fan's frame, bringing the old, discarded desks for support- even if it was for the sake of peeking, maybe he deserves some praise for putting so much effort into it.
At present, Utsumi's effort was greatly rewarded. Moment by moment, the camera's memory is filled with undressed girls.
It's understandable for them not to notice. The back of the club room had no windows, the fan is three meters high so nobody paid attention to it.
Not one person noticed the fact that the fan's frame was subtly warped. Therefore, Utsumi's plan against the tennis club could be called perfect.
If there was a miscalculation, it could only be that he didn't notice the gloomy path weaving its way through the groove of trees was used as a shortcut.
And so, when *she* called out to him asking for his identity, her character was not simple enough to make it a prior warning.
"Uhii!?"

Suddenly something shook underfoot. Realizing that someone kicked the desks serving as scaffolding, his plump relaxed body fell, aiming for the ground.

" - uu!"

He fell on his back. For an instant, his breathing stopped. Without really being able to scream in pain, extremely nervous and convulsing, Utsumi fainted.

"Good grief - "

A murmur reached his ear. For some reason he could clearly understand that voice even in the middle of roaring noise made by the falling bricks.

He slowly opened his eyelids, tightly closed in pain. The first thing in his field of vision were two slender, long legs.

Ankles closed tightly. Calves covered with knee socks. Firm tights - extremely healthy, the beautiful legs of an active person.

Legs he recognized. Without having to look at her face, Utsumi knew who those legs belonged to. Track club, second year, Kudo Nanase.

They were without doubt the legs of that girl, his main target.

Forgetting the situation he was in, Utsumi was fascinated by those legs soaring before his eyes.

The one he captured on hundred of pictures but as expected looking at them so close, the intensity was different.

Furthermore, because of the extremely low angle he was looking from, he could see almost to her crotch. Those essentials were covered by her skirt but they were very suggestive.

This was a chance. Forgetting the pain in his body Utsumi shuffled his feet remaining in the same position, approaching Nanase.

More, just a bit more...

He stretched his neck to the limit, trying to peek behind the mystery veil but -



Together with a crash resounding all around his cranium, his field of vision was plunged into darkness.
"Guu......Gyaa....?"
While not understanding that his face was stepped on, Utsumi tried to brush away the thing covering his eyes. But he was powerless against the unforgiving trampling that didn't hesitate to rub dirt into his eyes.
"You really don't learn, do you?" Nanase spit out disgusted, while stepping on and grinding Utsumi's face.
"Don't techniques like reflection and regret suit your body, bizarre frog man?"
"Fuu....Fuguu...Gyaaah....!"
Although her manner of speaking was excessive, Utsumi had no strength to object, his face being ground and all, so he clenched his teeth.
That was the moment when the girls from the tennis club rushed out, hearing noise.
" - Nanase-san?"
"Yo."
Nanase replied to Mie's reflexive cry, lightly raising her hand. Of course, she didn't stop stomping and treading on the piece of meat beneath her feet.
Noticing that movement, Mie shifted her gaze to Nanase's feet. And then, to the surroundings.
First of all to the source of the noise, the scattered desks. And then on the CCD camera thrust into a crack made in the ventilation fan. The small monitor connected to the camera was swinging like a pendulum.
It was a very clear scene. After looking at Utsumi with a penetrating cold glance, she exchanged looks with her colleagues that followed her.
There was no need for words. Reading Mie's intent just by eye contact, they rushed back to the club-room.
Ten seconds after, the club's door was opened for a second time and all the girls in the club rushed out with rough steps. They speedily encircled Utsumi and glared at him with eyes burning in anger.
A bit later the first years came out of the club-room. The reason they were late could be clearly seen. They collected the lynching tools. As expected they avoided the rackets, the emphasis was on the mop. But one person was holding a battered metal bat taken from somewhere.
".....Thank you, Nanase-san. That's enough." Mie said in a restrained voice.
"Yeah."
Nanase nodded, knocking down Utsumi's head with a thick sound. While his body was faced up, she turned his head. Again, his head twisted.
"Oo...Okekereba..."
Bearing a pain intense enough to break his neck-bones, Utsumi rolled his body the same way his neck did.
Nanase chose that moment, when he was lying with his face on the ground, to retreat in a slippery manner of walking. That was only for the sake of not

having the insides of her skirt exposed while removing her leg but of course, nobody complained that it was overkill.
The girls were rather impressed by that brilliant movement.
"Uuu.....Uuuuu....."
The released Utsumi tried to get up. And then he saw the expression of the girls surrounding him.
"Uu....aaah...."
Revitalized by fear, Utsumi revealed a sight of agony and death. Realizing he could not escape, he started to explain in a trembling voice.
"Th- this is art..."
"Shut up, you're annoying."
His thoughtless words rejected, Mie thrust her hand out to the first years, waiting behind her.
"Demolishing bat!"
"Yes!"
Without a moment's delay, the first years presented her the scratched metal bat. Strongly gripping the overused bat, Mie shouted.
"Heavenly punishment!!"
"Oooooooooooooo!"
Rising their voices, the girls raised their tools. And then like birds of prey swarming around a dead body, they jumped on the petrified Utsumi.
"Uu, Waaaaaahhh!"
A torrent of high pitched shrieks - and then silence.
"........"
Nanase meaninglessly raised her eyes to the sky and then, shifted her attention to the place where the gruesome lynching was performed. The target was silenced but still, the *sword of justice* was continuously swinging downward. The girl's faces were radiating great joy.
"Should I stop it?"
"It's fine."
As if reading Nanase's thoughts, a smiling voice could be heard from her side. Turning her face around, before she knew, the one that commanded the punishment, Mie stood beside her.
"Are you satisfied, Sugino?"
"Yeah, as you can see -"
Mie was holding the metal bat, stroking gently the *sword blade* stained in new blood.
"The demolishing bat has the power to wound and kill and beside it could turn bad so I had to stop."
"Must be hard being the vice-president."
"We are of equal status in this regard."
Both exchanged a bitter smile, bonding for being in the same place and having the same troubles.
Unrelated to the disastrous scene happening a few meters before them, there was a gentle atmosphere around these two.

"By the way, I didn't properly thank you. Thank you very much for today. You helped us twice."
"That's fine. The track club was also at a loss when it came to Utsumi so it wasn't just your business."
"Maybe it would have been better to do something like this quicker, huh?" Mie said while looking at the girls beating the hell out of Utsumi.
"True. This kind of idiot will only be spoiled if left alone. Because he doesn't understand when talking to him, there's no way but to painfully teach it to him."
"True. That's so true!"
Grasping tightly the metal bat, Mie nodded awfully forceful.
"Now that we inherited the *Demolishing Bat*, we can't permit perverted acts towards the members!"
".......No, I don't think that has anything to do with it..."
"Is that so? Anyway, it would be fine if the idiot learned something from that experience."
They both had the same opinion on this point so Nanase nodded.
"Certainly. But don't overdo it. It's not worth it to be charged with a crime because of such a guy."
"I know. Leave it to me."
Leaving it to the girl that declared so pulling out her chest, Nanase said her parting words.
"Then, I leave the rest to you. See you tomorrow."
"Yeah, see you tomorrow."
A commonplace greeting. Smiling at each other. Without foundation, both believed that the tomorrow that will come will be the same as today. At that hour, they still thought so.

Part 4

"Hmm, did something like that happened yesterday?"
The next day's lunch break.
While eating her lunch, Nanase told her friends - Kannagi Ayano and Shinomiya Yukari yesterday's incident.
"Ha ha, he got what he deserved," Ayano replied delightedly from the bottom of her heart.
She also thinks Utsumi's deeds are unpleasant so she doesn't have a particle of sympathy for him.
"So, is he still alive?"
At Ayano's question Nanase simply shrugged her shoulders as if saying *I wonder*. Substituting her friend who really didn't care from the bottom of her heart, Yukari answered.
"Of course he's alive. Because luckily Ayano-chan wasn't at that place."
Yukari was wearing her shoulder length hair wavy, and seemed like a very gentle girl. Although speaking slowly, quite a number of people noticed at times her irony.

"I see, that was unlucky - wait a second!"
But, because they were friends for a long time Ayano couldn't be deceived. On the verge of noticing, she glared with half open eyes at her friend, grinning at her with a happy smiling face.
"Didn't you just say something inexcusable with a straight face just now?"
"I wonder...I only spoke the truth."
"That's even worse!"
"Kya- Nanase-chan help!"
Pretending to be scared of the roaring Ayano, whose face was blazing, Yukari hid behind Nanase.
"Wait!"
"Kyaa-"
The moving around Ayano. Yukari escaping again. Gradually increasing their speed, both started running round and round around Nanase.
"You guys, I'm in the middle of eating-"
Amazed, Nanase warned them but without seeming to hear both continued to run around.
After fixedly staring at them, Nanase closed the bentou lid and casually pushed out her leg forward. With superb timing, that leg caught Ayano running in front of her.
"Waahyaa!"
Ayano fell forward with all her strength. As expected, she avoided falling down but Yukari crashed into her back half a second later.
"Waaa!"
"Kyaaa!"
Entangled, Ayano and Yukari tumbled on the floor of the rooftop. Disregarding those two, Nanase calmly resumed her meal.
"Ow...uch..."
Several seconds after, Ayano got up raising a grazed moan. Tearing off Yukari's body tangled with hers as in a judo locking technique, she stood up while arranging her hair.
"Na - na - se."
Being spoken to in such a harsh voice, Nanase didn't show any sign of being perturbed. While steadily chewing her fries she just put in her mouth, she declared as a matter of course.
"I told you I'm in the middle of eating. You were raising dust."
"But still suddenly tripping me up-"
"It's fine, I carefully chose the opponent. I wouldn't do it to anyone except you."
"Don't do it to me either!"
"By the way-"
Ignoring Ayano's outcry, Nanase turned her eyes to Yukari. Finally getting up while cleaning the dust off her clothes Yukari tilted her head as if asking *What is it?*
"Do you know?"

Yukari accurately read the aim of the untitled question.
"About Utsumi-kun? Of course he didn't die, nor is he hospitalized. You see, people don't generally use tools and seriously strike at someone, right?" said Yukari while fleetingly glancing at Ayano.
Sensing that, Ayano frowned.
"Why were you looking at me?"
Yukari nonchalantly turned away. As if she didn't hear anything, she continued her conversation with Nanase.
"That's why, the injury he received from those blows is pretty much to the level of mouth cuts. They said his bones are whole."
"Just that...."
"Yes, just that. As expected, he will stay in bed today but compared to the damage he would have suffered from Ayano-chan, that's just like a gentle brush."
"Why are you using me as an example?" Ayano raised her voice again.
Sensing she had reached a critical section, Yukari didn't ignore her this time and faced her with an honest face.
"Listen to me, Ayano-chan."
"Wh- what?"
The atmosphere suddenly changed and as if pressured by Yukari closing in, Ayano retreated a little.
"I think of Ayano-chan as an important friend."
"I see.....thanks."
That was a pretty common thing to say but not in this context.
She nodded frankly.
"That's why, please-"
The light of sincerity dwelling in her eyes, like a prayer, like a request, Yukari continued.
"So please, don't say such mean things to me."
".........."
Ayano's temple had a cramp. Staring at Yukari with a dark glare, she let out a voice that must have crawled from the bottom of hell.
"Yu - ka - ri...."
"Wh ~ a ~ t?"
Contrary to Ayano's dark tone, Yukari's reply didn't have an atom of darkness. The song-like tone felt like the elegance of a bright spring.
There's no need to say it but this only had the opposite effect.
Ayano slightly moved forward her center of gravity, the muscles all over her body poised. An attitude that gave the impression of a feline hunter on the verge of leaping on her pray.
"Yukari....it seems necessary. We need to have a lengthy discussion one of these days......"
Ayano let out a low, small whisper. It seems it was lost in wind but it was the kind of sentence that would definitely reach the other party.

The tiptoes of Ayano's feet placed on the floor, lightly scratched the concrete.
When the few moments before the strife began expanding over and over - at that time -
"Oh, it's open!"
Several boys came to the rooftop with a basket ball. It seems they wanted to exercise some after eating.
The minute that the door was opened Ayano and Yukari returned to their former positions so fast it didn't even leave an afterimage.
Sitting straight, those figures smiling elegantly didn't show any sign a cat fight was about to happen seconds before.
"Hurry up. The lunch break will end - huh?"
The boy in the front - apparently a first year - finally perceived Ayano's group. His eyes opened wide in surprise.
"Shi- Shinomiya-san? Kudo-san and- and even Kannagi-san?"
The good fortune of being able to see the Academy's top three beautiful girls in the same place made the boy's face become loose. On the faces of the boys following him, an expression of supreme bliss floated.
"I'm sorry, we're in the middle of lunch. Can you restrain yourselves?" asked Yukari, while showing an brutally cute smile.
As there were no boys who could go against that face, they immediately replied with a straight posture.
"Of- of course! We're apologizing for causing you trouble!"
"We're sorry."
Moreover, Ayano's smile increased the tension. The boys' consciousness flew higher than the sky, their thinking ability all evaporated.
Nanase saw off the departing boys, their faces intoxicated.
The door closed, the sound of footsteps died out and waiting a few more seconds just to make sure, Nanase spoke with a sigh.
"How to put this - both of you have a tremendous skill in hiding your true selves."
"Isn't it fine? There're all happy.", Yukari replied with a nonchalant face.
Ayano didn't reply, on account of resuming her lunch.
Understanding she said something completely pointless, Nanase feebly shook her head, resuming her thoughts. She once again looked at Yukari who knew all the gossip.
"So, Yukari. Was his punishment decided?"
"Three days of house arrest," Yukari quickly replied to Nanase's question.
Unintentionally Ayano shouted when hearing the too indulgent punishment.
"Just that?"
"Just that. He was a first offender."
Also dissatisfied, Nanase frowned.
"It could have been so peaceful had he been expelled......."
"That's impossible. If it's Utsumi-kun, they won't expel him before raping someone."

"<<If it's Utsumi-kun>>? What do you mean by that?"
"He's from a rich family in hospital administration. The amount of his donations is top class."
"Ah, I see."
At the tough reality, Nanase kept silent with a sullen face.
Seiryou Academy was a private school but it wasn't unaffected by the declining birth rates. The period when only the best pupils were selected had passed and because its name was famous, noted families pursued it.
The management was definitely not difficult but the funds were never enough.
To put it in simple words, it was hard to part from valuable gold.
"I heard rumors he entered the school through the back door, that guy."
"Yeah, but those rumors were false."
"Were they?"
"Yes.", Yukari declared with no doubt.
That was an information unavailable to a simple student but neither Ayano nor Nanase were suspicious about it. Frankly this girl, without changing her gentle exterior appearance, or maybe in accordance with her image was randomly well connected.
Currently she is occupying the position of secretary in the Student Council but except for that she belongs to different committees and influential clubs. On top of that she has connections among the teaching staff.
That vast and subtle information network had an unparalleled accuracy. No school event escapes her eyes.
"That's why, he'll probably come back to school after three days with a calm face. Maybe he will be quiet for some time and reflect upon his actions."
".....I wonder."
Remembering his persistent gaze trying to look under her skirt even after he was caught during the crime, Nanase breathed a sigh, fed up with it.
"It can't be helped, even if it's a makeshift solution. If he will continue with this crap day after day, no matter how stupid he is, he will come to care about his well being."
"Like yesterday? Ah, about that-"
"What?"
"Wasn't Sugino-san the one that organized yesterday's beating? It seems she suddenly fell into a coma."
"Ehh? Is that true?"
Unintentionally Nanase asked again so Yukari's lips became sharp seeming displeased.
"I never tell false information."
"Well, that's true - that's just so strange, she looked so well yesterday," said Nanase doubtfully.
Yukari raised her finger and said to her.
"Maybe she was cursed by Utsumi-kun, huh?"

" - Yukari, that's not funny."

"Eh, that was an indiscretion. I'm sorry."

Gazing at Yukari, putting out her tongue, Nanase anxiously frowned with a light reprimand.

She told herself she was thinking too much. But she instinctively knew. That this is just the beginning. That something bad, something really bad is just about to happen.

Chapter 2 - How to defeat a magician

Part 1

As if during a wake, heavy silence was looming over class 2-B waiting for the morning opening.

Three days have passed since then. Utsumi's house arrest finished yesterday. Already there wasn't a single person who didn't know why was that man punished.

Maybe he won't come. That thought, accompanied by a feeling of oppression that could crush their hearts was darkly dyeing the class and the Academy.

From that moment three days ago, yes only three days passed. During that time seven girls from the tennis club have been assaulted. Some had traffic accidents. Others lost their consciousness, continuing to look at something invisible.

They were victims of an unknown illness and still unconscious even after so long.

There were plenty of reasons. There wasn't anything common between them.

There was a lot of suffering in a small period of time but looking at it logically, there is no other explanation except *accident*.

But.

There wasn't a single person in this class that believed they happened by chance.

There was a connection. One that exceeded both logic and common sense.

The man named Utsumi Kousuke.

The ones that brought down the punishment for the locker room peeking incident, the ones that took the initiative, the seven that had unexpected accidents.

In a sense, Utsumi became a school celebrity. His gloomy personality was well known and the locker room peeking incident was known around the school the next morning.

Ant then immediately following that, the chain of accidents clearly exceeding chance. The fact that a lot of people connected those two was the natural outcome.

When the first person collapsed some jokingly said it.

"It's him."

"Because of Utsumi's extreme resentment, she was cursed."

At that time, it was still a joke. But as the number of victims increased the number of people who took it as a joke decreased and then disappeared.

A curse.

They started talking about such an unscientific word as if it was real.

Various rumors appeared.

That Utsumi was hiding close by when the traffic accidents happened -

That one girl staring into empty space screamed *"Utsumi is there!"*

That late at night a transparent Utsumi appeared by the bedside of a girl in a comma.
Everything was a rumor. It had no foundation.
But the mystery of the occurring *accidents* were coupled with Utsumi's weirdness and the unscientific occult stories had a strange sense of reality.
Especially for his colleagues in 2-B this wasn't a joking matter. If only Utsumi wasn't in this class -
"Good morning!"
".....!!"
The entire class' eyes concentrated on the girl that casually entered.
That was the girl that started the Utsumi's punishment in the first place - Kudo Nanase.
If Utsumi was the one that cursed the girls from the tennis club, then she should have been first on his list.
But Nanase has yet to meet with misfortune. That being the case, everything must be a coincidence. Or maybe she was being reserved for the best feast - most of the people thought so.
"............."
Reacting with a frown to their gazes full of fear and pity, Nanase stared at them one by one.
Overpowered by the unflinching gaze, the entire class turned their eyes away.
"Good grief...."
Sighing from the bottom of her heart and as if pushing her way through the gloomy atmosphere, Nanase went to her spot.
Sitting down somewhat roughly, this time she really let out a small breath.
"The situation is so awkward..."
It seems most people believe the rumors. Fearing the paranormal abilities of Utsumi - no, being influenced by the fearful atmosphere.
Maybe there are people among these who were joining in Utsumi's cajolery. Together with such unpleasant thoughts, Nanase remembered yesterday's situation.

"What did you say?"
Hearing such words that didn't seem likely to be true, Nanase involuntarily asked back in a loud noise.
As if not wanting to meet her eyes the tennis club girls hid their faces en mass.
Seeing that no matter how long she waited they wouldn't speak, Nanase repeated her question in a somewhat stiff manner.
"I'm sorry but can you repeat it once more?"
"Th- that....I mean......"

As a representative, the second-year manager - Tanaka Yui, timidly started speaking.
"Don't you want us all......to apologize.....to Utsumi-kun?"
"What for?", replied Nanase immediately.
She continued, as if trying to press for an answer the girls keeping silent.
"What kind of reason is there to apologize to that guy? *We're sorry for not letting you peek* or something?"
The solid argument silenced the girls'. But decidedly they didn't agree.
"Keep your cool", Nanase persuaded them in a calm voice staring at those faces with the same expression.
"There's only one way to make that sort of man behave himself. If we take a resolute attitude then - "
"But - But - !", Yui shouted, interrupting Nanase's words, unable to hold it in any longer.
"We'll be cursed! There's no other way! Mie-san won't wake up, even Madoka - "
"Madoka? Did something happen to Shina?"
Shina Madoka is a second year in the tennis club and perhaps the most beautiful girl in the club. Wearing her somewhat quirky hair in a ponytail, she was an lively girl but -
"She suddenly collapsed when she was talking with me over the phone yesterday - She was attacked by Utsumi's vengeful spirit!", Yui shouted as hard as she could. A scream full of fear and horror.
All the girls listened to her with pale faces. It's not like they heard the story the first time. They knew the details in advance. But they couldn't grow accustomed to it, no matter how many times they heard it. It was understandable. It wasn't a simple ghost story. Because anyone could be next.
"I heard Utsumi's voice over the phone. Even if Madoka was in her room! She desperately said: *Please, stop, I'll do whatever you say* But - But!"
The first years plugged their ears. Squatting down while strongly closing their eyes, their faces full of bitterness.
"No......no more....."
Bursting into tears Yui stared at Nanase with a rough breath, cornered, her pupils swaying between sanity and madness.
"That's why it can't be helped. Before she was attacked Madoka said so. That Utsumi threatened her. That he told her to do as he said if she didn't want to be cursed."
"Did he want sex?"
If possible, she wanted to hear a denial but the Yui hanged her head in shame, her body trembling. She hit the bull's eye.
"He's a thorough sleazebag, that bastard....."
As one would expect she was shocked. But, right now there was another problem.

Staring at the frightened, anxious girls, Nanase asked frankly, so that there won't be any misunderstanding.
"What you are trying to say is that instead of getting cursed it's better to give him your bodies, right?"
"......!"
Having the reality thrust before their averted eyes, their faces warped with pain.
If they were to calmly think about, it was impossible to permit such a thing. Regardless of them being experienced or not, to permit that *thing* to play with their bodies.
But if doing so would buy their safety, there is no reason to stop.
"If you want to do such a thing, it would be better to do it. I have no particular reason to stop you. But I'm out. I choose death."
As if showing there's no room for argument, Nanase turned her back to the girls. And then walked away.
"Wait - "
Nanase didn't stop. She didn't want to waste her time on something useless.
"Why are you talking as if it doesn't concern you? Isn't it your fault? Take responsibility!"
Unintentionally Nanase turned her head around when hearing the accusing words.
"Responsibility?"
What do you mean? was her face saying but then she saw the girls' faces. She understood it all.
"Ah, I see.", she replied emotionless.
"What you try to sell it's not your bodies but mine. Then just say so."
"Wr- wrong!"
Being looked at like a stone on the roadside, with a glance full of disdain, Yui's complexion changed and she objected.
"I'm not thinking about pushing this on Kudo-san. It's just that Utsumi-kun likes Kudo-san so you should come together with us - "
"I refuse."
Without reserve, Nanase bisected that reason and threw it away.
"My fault? Responsibility? Don't be naive. I stopped him at that place but you were the ones who decided to lynch him. Take responsibility for your own actions."
"I - I didn't decide it! I was just dragged into this by Mie and the others, that was all...."
A bitter cry. Hearing Yui's words, trying to dodge responsibility so late in the game, Nanase replied somewhat indifferent.
"Just tell Utsumi that."
"Uuu...waaaaaaaaaaaahh!"
Yui broke down crying. The other girls consoled her while looking at Nanase with reproach. But Nanase didn't even flinch.

Feeling attacked by Nanase's severe glint in the eye, all the girls cast their eyes down.

"Why....why did it turned out like this? Were we doing something wrong? Would it have been better to keep quiet and let him do as he pleased!? ...Hey, answer!"

Raising up her tearful face, Yui shouted. But there was no one there to answer. Nanase too, didn't know what was the best thing *those girls* could have done.

But it was obvious what *she* should do.

"Tomorrow - "

Nanase informed the other girls, who started crying too as if Yui's cry was contagious.

"Tomorrow, if Utsumi comes to school I'll talk to him."



"T- talk?"
It doesn't seem that there is any place for discussion at this point. Nanase continued disinterestedly seeing the surprised girls, not understanding her intention.
"If it doesn't get through to him and if he really can use something like magic, perhaps I can do something. I know someone who can. That's why, don't be rash."
"........"
Finishing what she had to say, Nanase turned her back to the surprised girls and started walking.
"Is she still there?"
While regretting she got such a late start, first Nanase went toward the student council.
If Utsumi can use magic, he may be too much for her. But, she had friends. Friends who, in various ways, were very reliable.

"......thc!"
The opening door made a rough sound and then, a large number of people simultaneously suppressing the indication of a shudder, called Nanase back from the depth of her thoughts.
Following the others, she looked at the door. She frowned at the expected scene.
He, was there.
A short body that seemed pressed from above. The loosen body without any training. His amphibian neglected face covered in pimples and his cold sweat, oozing out regardless of season, glistening.
"Utsumi.....", someone whispered in a grazed voice.
That's right, the one standing there was without mistake Utsumi Kousuke.
But -
An extremely uncomfortable feeling spread out in waves.
His outside appearance didn't change in the slightest. But he was a totally different person.
His facial expression, his eyes were different. The servility-like complexion and his upturned eyes that sneakily peeked at other people disappeared without a trace.
Instead his eyes were lodging with an arrogance that scorned everything else beside him. On his ugly warped mouth scorn was clearly expressed.
"Move.", Utsumi ordered proudly. Unexpectedly the pupil standing in front of him jumped as if he came across garbage. That action came more from disgust rather than fear but Utsumi smiled with his whole face comfortably.
"Ku ke ke."

He started walking laughing loud enough to hurt their ears and the students around opened the way in hot haste. The people standing down at their desks that were in his way took distance.
Utsumi walked on, literally on a straight line. The one at the arriving point was -
"Nanase."
Having been addressed so friendly Nanase raised her eyebrows in discomfort. She looked up at Utsumi standing in front of her in silence.
"........what's up with that expression?"
Utsumi was visibly irritated seeing that Nanase wasn't scared of him. The dangerous situation was filing the air.
Feeling the electrifying atmosphere the students held their breath and stood rock still.
"Nanase!"
"H- hey, wait - "
When Utsumi called out for the second time Nanase's name, one classmate readied himself and seized Utsumi's shoulder. Turning back, before the boy was able to say something, Utsumi exploded in a shrill voice.
"Don't touch me!"
At the same time his arm struck the young man's chest. With no technique, just a blow with all his strength.
"Gaaah!?"
But that power was tremendous. Seeming to make a thick sound the boy's body was blown off a few meters and after falling on top of a bench he crashed into the wall.
His limbs fell on the floor with a heavy sound and the exhausted body was motionless.
"................."
In the still as death classroom, the turned inside out angry voice propagated.
"Don't talk to me so over-familiarly! I'm different from you! I was chosen, I'm a noble person granted power! Know your place, filth!"
Saying so while rough breathing, Utsumi looked down on Nanase again.
"We need to talk. Follow me Nanase."
Without waiting for a reply he turned back and started walking. But after making a few steps and noticing Nanase didn't move, he turned around with force.
"I told you to follow me!"
His eyes became bloodshot.
While sitting Nanase gazed at Utsumi quietly. Her eyes turned up but there wasn't a particle of flattery in them. While phisically looking up her eyes were psychologically looking down.
"Listen to me Nanase!"
At Utsumi's shout Nanase showed a cold smile. And then she slowly opened her mouth.

"It's Nanase-san for you.....frog asshole."
"................tch!"
His boiling anger dyeing the frog face red, Utsumi ground his teeth. The sound of it reached the pupil's ears.
"Humph."
Laughing at the depth of Utsumi's self-importance, Nanase calmly stood up.
"Well, I'll go with you. Lead the way."
Permitting it with the voice of a clearly superior person, she ordered his guidance.
"C- come with me!"
At the scream with no composure, Nanase coolly nodded and followed after. It was said after that situation seemed like the one between a paid-for slave and his lady proprietress.

Part 2

Utsumi slowly stopped after reaching the rear garden - a place that should also be called the delinquents' spot.
Putting two meters of distance between them, Nanase confronted him.
Clearly led on, Utsumi couldn't clearly open him mouth to talk. It seems he wanted to look composed but his eyes and fingertips moved nervously. It was obvious he was getting impatient.
On the other hand while Nanase's eyes were fixed on Utsumi's, she was still. Although she wanted to urge the conversation, she didn't break the ice and with a chilly look she observed the other party.
"Y- you know why I called you right?"
Finally approaching the limit of patience, Utsumi restlessly started the conversation.
With an indifferent bearing Nanase shrugged her shoulders.
"Who knows..."
" - tch, d- do you want the same fate as the tennis club women? Your fate is in my hand!"
"How terrible."
Answering in a quiet tone, uninterested, she looked down on Utsumi.
"So, when are you going to ask the main question?"
"Y- you...!"
Seeing that Nanase doesn't respond *the right way* Utsumi's originally limited reasoning was on the verge of snapping apart.
His temple blood vessels pulsated with a fairly dangerous impression.
"Look at this!"
As if a transparent ball was held between his hands, he straightened his bad posture. To one that resembled the firing <<Ki>> technique from games and manga.
"KURARARARARA - Ahhhhhhh!"

Letting out a ten odd seconds scream, together with his spineless yell he pushed out both hands. Doing so, something invisible gushed out from between his palms and ran past Nanase's side.
Bakiii!
Behind her the sound of something breaking could be heard.
Looking over her shoulder, a tree trunk larger than her waist had just been broken from inside.
It seems it was smashed by Utsumi's Kame Hame Ha just now.
" - wow."
Nanase let out a whisper of admiration. Feeling empowered from it, Utsumi shouted triumphantly.
"What do you think of my power? This is not all, my real power is *<<Curse>>*! I can make you ill from far away and even kill you! Did you know? The laws of this country can't punish spell curses. Even if they catch me at the crime scenes the police won't find any proof!"
"............"
Nanase didn't say anything. She wasn't particularly surprised. She knew about it from yesterday's lecture.
"Wa hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya hya!"
Perceived that silence in some way, Utsumi laughed with a clearly aberrant voice. He laughed and laughed and rolled about with laughter and glared at Nanase with a crazed expression.
"That's why you can't but feel brittle in front of me! You cannot help but become self-conscious about your own pettiness and pitifully beg for forgiveness! Right?"
Around Utsumi small explosions resounded one after another. His hair fluttered with no wind and the grass beneath his feet was tore off and fluttered in space.
His <<Ki>> was running wild. That was a phenomenon produced by the disorderly emission of <<Ki>> that he couldn't control but Nanase doesn't know that.
With a cold, transparent look she quietly gazed at Utsumi's disgraceful behavior as if it was an interesting but meaningless exhibition.
"So, I'll ask of you once! But even without asking the answer is obvious! Be my slave Nanase!"
"I refuse."
The timing of her answer gave a cross-counter feeling as if hitting the side of his face at the peak of pride.
Not understanding what she said, Utsumi's eyes became round with an idiotic expression.
"Wh- what?"
"I said I refuse.", Nanase repeated most indifferent.
"Don't be conceited. Even if you obtained a somewhat useful power, your own value doesn't change. You weren't an asshole because you had no

power. Because your character is vile you're still an asshole. Come again after you start thinking about that."

"Y- yo- youu..."

His small body shaking, Utsumi stood rock-still. Because of too much anger he couldn't speak. Because he obtained a great power, a power greater that anyone else's he was a great being.

That's why, because of her own powerlessness, Nanase wouldn't refuse him. She couldn't help but accept the honor of being his slave with tears of happiness.

That - That -

"Did you finished talking? Then we're done here. Class is starting."

Without even thinking how much disrespect she was committing, Nanase spoke carelessly.

He couldn't forgive her.

He must punish her.

He must put her in her place.

"Wait!", Utsumi called out in a low tone the back facing the classroom. He showed killing intent for that face, bothersome turning around.

For the second time he took the <<Ki>> throwing position.

He had absolute confidence in the wave of power swelling in the space between his palms. A mass of <<Ki>> was growing between them.

An invisible destructive energy, whose existence could only be recognized by the small distortion in the space around it.

Nobody can oppose that power. It cannot be judged by the law.

- Therefore, no matter what he does it is fine

- if it cannot be imprisoned in the frame of law and common sense, anything is fine

"*...a somewhat useful power...?* - wrong, that's so wrong! This power makes me different from the mediocrity you belong to, it's the proof I am a chosen one!"

Nanase was silent. But it was clear from her unfeeling eyes that she didn't admit not even a part of Utsumi's reasoning.

"This is your last chance! Obey me Nanase! Or else - "

"Just try it."

"....................tch!!"

That one word made Utsumi loose the last part of his reason. Raising a voiceless scream, he pulled his hands to his right, one leg bent in front, the other extended behind and took a step forward -

"Too slow."

While following his standard movement, Nanase finished her preparation.

She picked the aim of the things she was holding and pressed the button. The electrical terminal sent out by the spring recoil instantly touched Utsumi's shoulder and the ten thousand volt current poured into newbie magician's body via wires.

"GAAH!?"

His large body quivering, Utsumi fell down like a puppet whose strings have been cut.
"Wa- wa- wa- what are you - ?"
Looking down on Utsumi who was unable to articulate his words, Nanase showed him what was in her hand.
"It's called electric gun. It's like a stun gun with long range capabilities."
But because it can be concealed in the hand it's something for either self protection or surprise attacks. A disposable, one shot weapon. And illegal.
Yesterday when they planned it all Yukari handed it to her but didn't ask how she got it. Too scared.
"Guu.....uuu....un...unfair...."
"It only means that modern science is more helpful than mud-smelling witchcraft"
Lightly retorting to Utsumi's feeble grunt she took out another one from the pocket of her blazer. Without hesitation she aimed for his head and shot.
"........Uu!"
The obese body fell heavily and then it was silent. It seem he lost consciousness from this round.
She stared fixedly at the inert body for another ten seconds. And after another ten seconds, confident he won't move Nanase let out a long breath or relief.
"....It went unexpectedly well."
"Huh, was it unexpected?"
At her unconscious murmur she heard a reply full of smiles.
Confused, Nanase slowly turned her head.
"Did you come?"
"Well of course, if by any chance..."
With brusque words, the girl appearing from the shade of the school building nodded while smiling.
It was Nanase's close friend, Kannagi Ayano. Yukari too was standing next to her.
"Good job."
" - Ah, I'm worn out.", Nanase replied tiredly at the rewarding remark.
It was a match not quite good for the heart, she had assumed a poker face in front of Utsumi but in her heart she was coldly sweating.
No matter how well thought the plan was, an ordinary person shouldn't pick a fight with a magician. Something like that is a job for a sword or hand-to-hand fighting household and has nothing to do with a member of the track and field club.
"Was there really no danger? I felt like walking on tightrope."
"Some degree of danger is unavoidable, right? Because it wasn't me there."
Ayano had absolutely nothing to do with this *incident*.
So no matter how foolish ecstasy made him, if she were to suddenly cross-examine him, he would have gotten suspicions.

So Nanase - the girl he was aiming for was the only one who could contact him with no suspicions, have him confess his crime and be able to make him ostentatiously display his power.

"Beside, I told you yesterday right? Sorcery in general is not such an absolute thing. Such a freshly made magician can be defeated by an amateur if taken by surprise."

To say it frankly sorcery was a craft that changed reality according to one's will. So to force out of the body such a will nothing else could be done except the magic.

In short, the great majority of people could adapt to such a thing.

Just by remembering the score, music doesn't burst out. The way of turning knowledge into craft needs more than learning by rote[1].

No matter how mighty a power you acquired, an amateur couldn't all of a sudden become a top-class magician.

The composition of a technique, its development, its activation - without separately validating such acts, to turn an assembly line product into mastery - a three days space was excessively short.

"You can aim for than gap. It's simple.", Ayano declared simply yesterday, when she was requested for magic counter-measures.

"It has nothing to do with the strength or type of one's power. For example, except Utsumi's magic, even if he has the capability of a direct attack, there's no need to be afraid. If he's attack range is less than three meters, you are absolutely faster."

Magic was not absolute. Nor almighty. If you fought against it without fear, it could be opposed with intelligence and effort.

"Well, it went good so it's fine. It all turned out well in the end or something."

As if she earned it, Yukari forced her way between them. But then, she was the one who outlined the plan.

How to calmly make Utsumi lose it? - Lecturing her even on the most insignificant details on how to effectively provoke him, going as far as to give her dangerous self-protection tools it's unknown if this girl had capabilities of mediation or maybe the natural virtue of not raising antipathy.

".......true.", releasing her discomfort together with the long breath, Nanase bowed her head to them.

"It's all your merit I was able to catch Utsumi without getting hurt. Thank you."

"You're welcome.", Yukari smiled sweetly receiving Nanase's thanks.

"Well, this is what I do.", Ayano lightly shrugged her shoulders.

"Leave the rest to me. I'll do something about the cursed girls."

Ayano herself couldn't do anything to remove the curse directly. The Kannagi technique was specialized to fight directly with Youma and was not suited for such sensitive work.

If it were Ayano's father or her uncle Genma they could burn only the curse without hurting the body but she didn't want to make such a big deal of it and request something like that from them, who were retired.

There was, yet, no need to do it.

Because she knew a more user-friendly practitioner.

I think a public servant should extensively work for the sake of civilians.

Thinking that if she were to say such a thing in front of that person she would get cursed, she walked to the school building.

The helper she called had already arrived.

Followed behind by two subordinates, the person waiting in front of the school building noticed Ayano and called out to her, waiving her hand cheerfully.

"Hi, Ayano-chan!"

Tachibana Kirika the Chief of the Special Investigation Unit greeted Ayano, smiling with all her face.

Part 3

"Did it go well?", Kirika inquired about the result point-blank.

Not completely understanding why was she so awfully proactive compared to when she forced the job on her, Ayano replied.

"Yes, he fell asleep after receiving the electric shock. He fell down in the back yard."

"I see - "

Nodding Kirika turned her eyes to her subordinates. To the muscular almost two meter tall man with an unsophisticated face and the beautiful but very severe short woman. Kirika ordered the huge height difference duo.

"Secure him!"

"Yes!"

The woman energetically saluted, the man bowed and bowed started running to the rear garden. But the speed difference was quite big and while the woman took three steps the man took only one.

Looking at him from the corner of her eyes, the woman screamed.

"Run faster!"

"Y- yes!"

The man's body shook as if hit by lightning and started to run with all his strength.

"Officer Kumagai!"

"Yees!"

Taking action hurriedly, the man - Kumagai started running once again.

For some reason or another the people left behind looked at his silhouette until it disappeared.
"Detective Tachibana?"
With a rare look filled with compassion, Ayano turned to Kirika.
"Are these the best in your force?"
"..........don't say it.", Kirika whispered closing her eyes with a sorrowful expression.
"That man, well.....he's not totally useless should time and circumstance permit."
That reply was delicately phrased but didn't have too much persuasive power.
As if trying to resist the subdued atmosphere Kirika slightly cleared her throat once. And then spoke in a formal tone.
"Well, at any rate we, the Special Investigation Unit will take Utsumi under custody. Leave the rest to us. So, Ayano-chan, can you explain it to me in detail?"
Ayano nodded. But - the class already started. It will be troublesome if she's seen loitering around school.
"Let's go out."
"It's fine. We'll borrow the reception office."
It seem there was no need for concern. Kirika was thoroughly prepared.
Or maybe it seemed like an excessive service.
Frowning, Ayano examined Kirika's facial expression.
"It seems you're considerably interested in this case."
"Ehh? Yes, I want to talk to you about that too. Let's go."
Admitting it quickly, she started walking ahead. Ayano followed after. And then -
"Why are you coming too?"
Suddenly turning her head around, Ayano glared at Yukari who followed them like it was the most natural thing in the world.
"Eh, I can't? It's unfair if its only Ayano-chan!"
"That's the problem!?"
"Oh well, let's put that jest behind us."
Yukari suddenly put on a serious face.
"No, I wasn't joking..."
Smoothly ignoring Ayano's protest, she looked at Kirika.
"If you want to hear a detailed story it would be bad if I was missing. Ayano-chan doesn't know much about it."
Kirika looked at Ayano. It seemed she trusted Ayano's judgement on this.
Reluctantly Ayano nodded.
"It's true I'm pretty much an outsider when it comes to this particular case. I think it would be easier to understand it if Yukari were to explain."
"As expected of Ayano-chan. You understood, huh?♥"
".........."
Ayano carelessly shook her head and called out to Nanase resignedly.

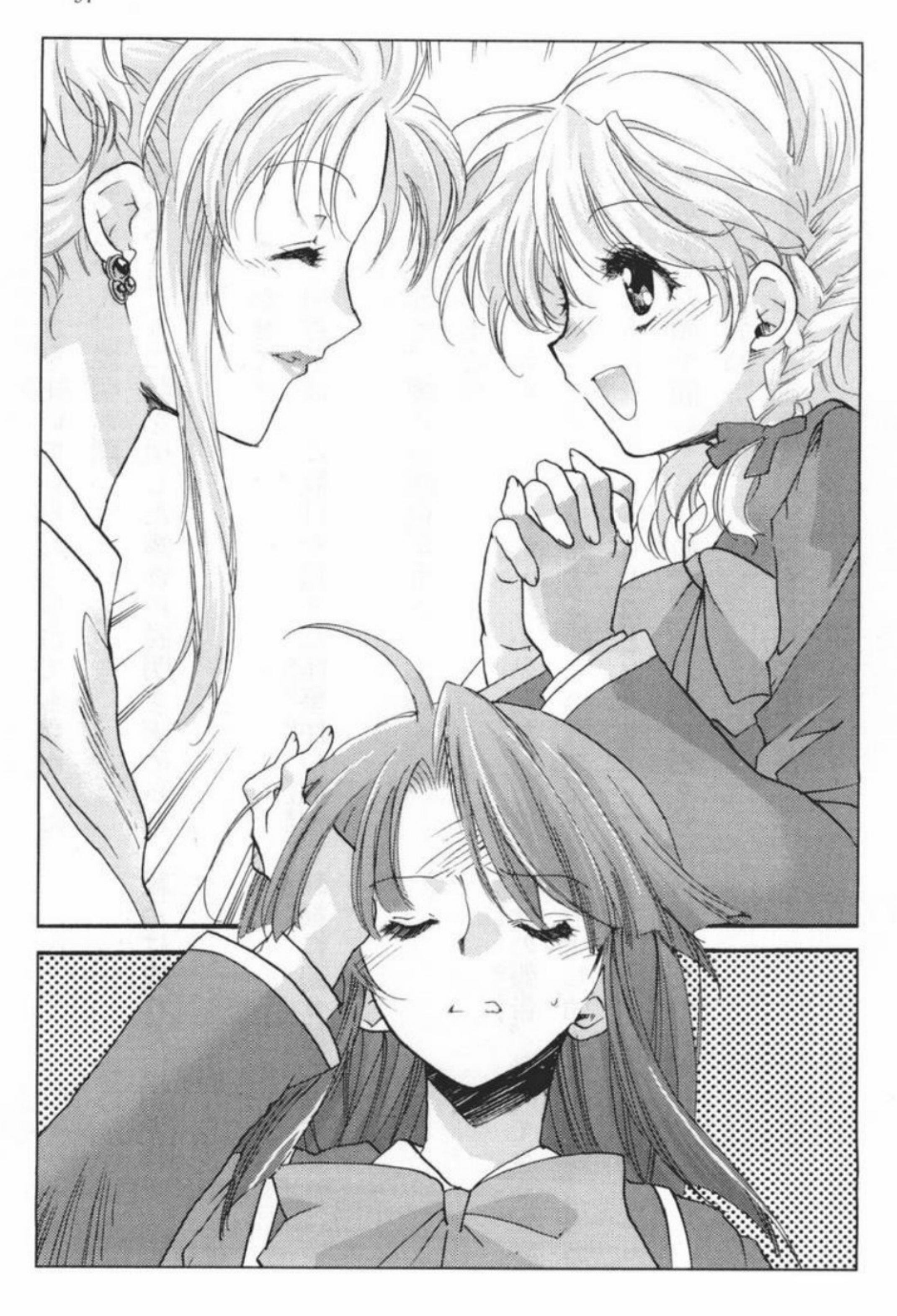
"Do you want to come too?"
"No."
Her answer was clear and simple.
"All I know Yukari knows too. I leave the rest to you."
And then Nanase turned her back on them and started walking away with no reluctance. That gallant walking figure disappeared inside the school building without looking over her shoulder once.
After Nanase's figure disappeared, Kirika let out an admiring mutter.
"That girl.....she's kind of cool, huh?"
"Right, Nanase-chan is really popular."
"Even among girls?"
"Ehh, that's where she's more than popular."
Yukari and Kirika exchanged a teasing smile. For some reason, they got along perfectly.
Sensing something chilling from the future these two would be intimate in, she forcibly urged them on.
"Oi, let's get going. Even if you have permission, I'll be yelled at if we're found!"
Why was she getting chills...?

"Please take your time."
The female clerk brought tea cakes - three of them - in a courteous manner.
"Yum, it's delicious - "
Quickly sipping tea, Yukari raised her voice in admiration. That was unavoidable. They knew by scent. This was Gyokuro, a top quality green tea.
Their treatment was excellent. Even if it seemed the school was not happy about the police intervention.
"Detective Tachibana, *what* did you tell them when borrowing this place?"
"Nothing much in particular.", said Kirika in the middle of elegantly sipping from her cup.
"Just, I told them all I knew and made small talk like It would be very serious if this were to be spread, right?"
"..........."
That was a clear threat, no subterfuge involved.
"As expected of Kirika-san. Lovely!"
Moreover, the final blow came from her neighbor. Looking at her, Yukari's eyes sparkled and looked up to Kirika with an expression of aspiration.
"As expected as long as the goal is reached the methods don't matter, huh?"
"Yes, I think so too."

The duo reaching an inhuman agreement. Looking at those smiles in opposition to what they just said, Ayano was intentionally perplexed.

"Why are the people around me all like this.....?"

But this was not the place to grieve over her personal misfortune.



"So, Ayano-chan please start."
As Kirika resumed the conversation like nothing happened and demanded an explanation, Ayano spoke in a worn-out voice.
"Yukari, please."
"Ok, leave it to me."
Nodding energetically, Yukari started talking about the details of the mystery cases that happened in the last few days.
"Hey...."
As it was all explained, Ayano's face became pale.
She heard only detestable things.
A very accurate description on the hospitalized victims, impossible to have without actually reading the clinical records. Information enumeration that only relatives could possibly know. At the time she started quoting from the police reports of the traffic accidents, Ayano unintentionally hugged her body to keep herself quiet.
On the other hand Kirika listened to it with a straight face but she could barely manage to hold it in.
"I see.....that's stereotypical."
After finishing listening to the report, Kirika murmured letting out a long breath.
"Stereotypical....?"
"You asked me before, right?"
At Ayano's question, Kirika started speaking with that introduction.
"Ayano-chan's request was like a godsend to me. Lately, this kind of incident is frequent."
"You mean, killing curses?"
"No, there are some but I don't know how to say it. Children from the middle to the second half of their teens suddenly started to manifest special powers. Ayano-chan was supposed to have come across something like that once, no?"
Surprised, Ayano raised her eyebrows. Without even thinking, she answered.
"The one in Ikebukuro - "
The flirty man who demonstrated a bizarre amplification of physical strength.
"Yes. Lately there are more and more of those kind of people. Not belonging to any special lineage nor there is evidence of learning it."
The same kind like Utsumi, who had nothing special to him except his peeping photos mania but suddenly obtained the power of magic.
"How about ability types and their strength?", Ayano asked, a freezing light dwelling in her eyes.
The face of a Jutsu-shi.

"It varies. Fire and wind, people who can manipulate electricity, enhance their bodies by magic power, use the Evil Eye. As for their ability, the Special Investigation Unit personnel has no choice but to deal with that degree of power."

It was the result of controlling power for the first time. As if Utsumi was defeated by Nanase, a civilian, no matter how large your power is, it's meaningless if you can't control it.

Even an incompetent but genuine Jutsu-shi who can perfectly control his ability has no reason to lose to an amateur who only has power.

But, to a civilian who doesn't know such things, it becomes an overwhelming advantage. The power to kill people without weapons and one that can't be judged by law, few will abstain from using it for personal gains.

"It's pretty much how Ayano-chan imagines it. They do whatever they like."

With good timing, Kirika supported Ayano's conjecture.

"Using their power for blackmail, for assault. On top of that fighting with others like them. Good grief, at least if they would be more cautions of public notice."

Ayano agreed with a hard facial expression. It's bothersome displaying their power in public. If mass-media would get wind of it, it would get very troublesome just to hush it up.

"Ah - I heard about that."

Without thinking of the serious atmosphere a simple-minded voice was heard.

Ayano and Kirika, both looked at the girl glad looking like a sweet bean jelly.

"Shinomya-san, can you tell us in more detail?"

"On an Internet bulletin board, there was that kind of post. Saying that in Shinjuku there are people who *psychic battle*."

"..........."

This time the girls looked at Kirika.

"Certainly, the incidents are concentrated in the Shinjuku. Was there something else."

Urging for a continuation, Yukari smiled apologetically.

"After that I skimmed it so I don't know a lot. It felt like some mysterious-less story so I didn't care."

"Mysterious-less, what do you mean?"

"It looked like some game talk. Such as special move or invincible combo, how many to defeat for level-up among other things."

"......what's up with that? Wasn't is really just game talk?"

"Yeah, I thought so too so I left it alone but - "

"But it's also true those kind of incidents happen."

Taking over Yukari's words, Kirika continued.

"Shinomiya-san, can you tell me after the address of that bulletin board?"

"Ah, yes, I understand."

Bringing that topic to a close, Yukari lightly agreed and changed her focus once more to Ayano.

"I don't think I need to say, a natural outbreak of people with special abilities at such a large scale is impossible. Someone or something hides at the bottom of this."

"I agree."

"That's why, I want you to cooperate with our investigation. The majority of people who obtained power are middle and high school students. It's possible incidents that happened in schools didn't reach out ears."

The space called school is organized like a society. Those inside are distrustful of the external world so outsiders - especially adults are equivalent with a different species. Kids hate adults. The teachers dislike scandal. If those two parties were to collide, nothing can be concealed.

Just like when a murder happens, the society settles as *an unfortunate accident*, the school is a miniature society.

"I'm asking you so can you help...and then - "

She winked significantly to Yukari. Ayano realized her intention but before she could object, Yukari nodded without reserve.

"All right, if you're fine with me I'll be glad to help."

"Yukari, you're promising without thinking again!", shouted Ayano, her complexion changed.

But even so Yukari wasn't perturbed. Her smiling face carried the firmness of her decision and clearly declared.

"This is not an empty promise. I know it could be dangerous but if it can be helpful to Ayano-chan I'll do it. You're always helping me, I need to reciprocate."

"Yukari......"

It's not like Ayano was hanging out with Yukari for so long just for show. She understood that at such times Yukari couldn't be persuaded.

However -

"Yukari, did your danger screw became loose or something? It's the same for the discussions we were having, shouldn't you think a little more before hanging out with people like me?"

"I think I told Ayano-chan before that there's nothing to be nervous about."

"That's something for me to decide, right? Even if we normally hang out, when such thing happen you should take your distance!"

"......those, aren't friends!"

Defeated by Yukari's expression who whispered so in a stunned expression, Ayano was at a loss for words. She looked at Kirika as if asking for assistance but she drank her tea pretending not to see her.

"Hey, this is tasty."

Sampling the green tea with each sip, she tried a different method. Regaining her composure she dealt with Yukari's persuasion.

"This time you understood right? Those like me hold an absolute superiority in regard for people like you. Don't you feel even a little fear?"

"As of today Utsumi-kun lost to Nanase, a civilian, so I'm not really scared."
"Don't joke around."
Ayano quickly rejected Yukari's attempt to joke. Feeling her friend's seriousness, Yukari slightly changed her expression.
And then, she said.
"Ayano-chan is different from Utsumi-kun."
Those obvious words said in an obvious way - included an unconditional trust.
"The weight of Ayano-chan's power, even if it's a little, I understand it. You have a strong heart that holds your power in check. That's why I love Ayano-chan."
Yukari clearly remembered even now the first time she saw Ayano's power.
She was scared.
Thoroughly burning to nothing a monster without even touching it, taking out a sword made of flames from an empty space and just by waving it once changing the surroundings in a sea of flames.
Even calling it overwhelming seems stupid, an immense power. When she found herself in front of that power, she had no choice but to see herself as a helpless petty existence.
She was scared.
More than the unfamiliar strange monster, the girl she thought of as a friend was much, much more scarier.
But - Ayano protected her.
Although hurt by her inconsiderate attitude, Ayano protected her. Although understanding their relationship would never be the same, that she was hated, Ayano still protected her.
She wouldn't forget her determined eyes.
She wouldn't forget her determined appearance from behind, her iron will.
"No matter what people like Utsumi-kun who only think about themselves do, there's no need to be afraid of Ayano-chan. It doesn't matter if all magicians except Ayano-chan are like Utsumi-kun. Because I believe in Ayano-chan."
Why did it seem so? That people only seeking pleasure, without knowing the responsibility privilege brings, were similar to Ayano.
Even imagining that was similar to an insult.
"Ehhh......Ah-,...ugh........", blushing in an embarrassed way, Ayano mumbled.
After being praised so much so earnestly, she couldn't find comeback words.
In front of Ayano, at a loss for words, Yukari expressed the same soft smile, as if understanding everything.
"So, please. Let me help you, please?"
Sweetly pestered by Yukari, Ayano put up resistance with all her strength by prolonging the silence,
But - Ayano was not strong nor heartless enough to refuse her now.

"Then, it's like that."
The moment Ayano, reluctantly, extremely reluctantly agreed, Kirika settled it.
Even though she feigned ignorance until now - Ayano glared at her with eyes full of resentment, Kirika was unconcerned.
"I'll be relying on you two. Because Kazuma is also on this so please get in touch if necessary."
"Is Kazuma doing this too?"
"Yeah, he's searching together with our newcomer."
At those unexpected word, Ayano's eyes opened wider.
"Do you have a practitioner capable enough to be Kazuma's partner?"
"No, that person's ability is unbearably burdensome but in the future it may become one of our main force. That's why, I think that person should accumulate as much experience as possible - what's the matter?", asked Kirika surprised, seeing Ayano frown.
In a strangely tight tone, Ayano asked:
"Is that person a beautiful woman?"
As one would expect, Kirika opened her eyes wide in surprise. But that face immediately expressed a Cheshire Cat smile.
"That's person is cute, for a man. He won't become Ayano-chan's rival in love so you can relax."
"Oh, Ayano-chan is so jealous.", said Yukari imitating Kirika.
But, although Ayano would get angry at such things, this time she didn't react.
Staring at Kirika doubtfully, Ayano asked her in a depressed tone.
"Detective Tachibana, do you think *that* Kazuma will cover for some burdensome man?"
"......Eh?"
"It's not even about neglecting him in a pinch. If Kazuma even believes that man will get in his way it's not unlikely he will behead him."
"Eh? No, but, to go that far......"
As if something suddenly came to her mind, Kirika's face became stiff.
And then, Ayano gave her the finishing blow.
"This is none of my business, but will he survive long enough to prove himself useful, that newcomer?"
".........."
This time, Kirika became completely speechless.

Part 4

"Waaaaaaaaahh!?"
Isurugi Daiki screamed from the bottom of his lungs.
Shinjuku third city block - that was one of the places public order was hard to maintain in this neighborhood.
Around here a scream was nothing more but one variety of background music.

Except if it was the case of a young beautiful girl, nobody listened to them anymore.
"Waaaaaaa!!", the man screamed again.
He had fairly capable lungs. If we considered the fact that he was sprinting with all his power, it was worth praise.
While running for his life, Daiki looked over his shoulder. Only two meters behind him, *that* was soundlessly drawing near.
A deep red dog. It wasn't a normal dog. The height of his head reached Daiki's stomach, and his body weight was without mistake larger. His deep crimson fur flickered as if the dog was clad in flames and his breath was spitting fire.
That silhouette, as coercive as a nightmare was appropriately called a hell dog.
"Gyahahahahaha! Die! Die! Die already!"
"Heeeeelp meeeeeeee!!"
Receiving from the back the death sentence, mixed with scorn, Daichi moved his legs very determined.

Isurugi Daiki, twenty three years old.
For the present time it was enough to say the Wisdom Eye he possessed, allowed him to live to this age.
His height was 163 centimeters, his physique counterbalanced by his baby-face, coupled together with fluffy hair resembling a cat's fur, he seemed bizarrely immature.
His over-sized costume didn't suit him. He had such a youthful look that although exaggerated, one may wonder if it he was allowed to watch PG-13 movies.
"Hii……Hiii….."
As expected, Daiki became tired, his feet unsteady while the crimson hell dog drove him away.
The man that seemed to manipulate the the dog shouted in an elated voice.
"Just die already, piggy!"
That's right, his occupation, totally unsuitable, was that of a policeman. And in addition to that, despite not having any sort of experience, he didn't work at some local police station.
He had a fairly special job.
"Gauu!"
In accordance with his master command, the crimson dog kicked the ground and jumped. It's sharp teeth aimed at Daiki's head.
"Hyaa!?"
That moment, Daiki's feet tangled and he fell down. It was only by chance. He didn't noticed the dog's attack.

But as a result, the dog jumped over Daiki's head and landed three meters forward.
The only damage Daiki received was a graze on the tip of his nose.
"Hoo..."
From a place separated a little from those two, Yagami Kazuma let out a murmur of admiration mingled with a smile.
"This is *the abnormal good luck of getting out of critical situations*, huh? I see, that's why he was assigned to the Special Investigation Unit."
Remembering the special mention written on the report, Kazuma made a somewhat wry smile.
From that figure, leaning on the building's wall, smoking tobacco, couldn't be felt even a shred of intent to rescue Daiki, found now in a desperate situation.
Getting up, neglecting Daiki, once again caught in the deathly game of tag, Kazuma looked at the other man.
He seemed older than Daiki but he was probably a minor. His long, dyed brown hair was messy. He wore a black leather jacket and black jeans, his knees visible. Instead of brass knuckles he wore rough rings on all his fingers and hard boots.
He was very much a Yankee-like man. His name was apparently Hell Hound.
"*<<The Hell Hound>>*, huh? It's manifesting nature is <<Fire>>. Does that mean its form is <<Summons>>?"
While thinking about various things by himself, he restored his gaze on the game of tag.
It seems the game was about to end. Daiki's physical strength was almost at its limit and his legs moved staggeringly, unable to run.
"Ku ku ku ku! I wonder how many points is the piggy's head worth?", shouted <<The Hell Hound>>.
And then, he ordered the hell dog to finally attack.
"Go, Garum!"
"!!"
The moment the hell dog, Garum, leaped, Daiki took out his gun.
A roaring gun shot.
The lead bullet was shot inside Garum's open mouth. The red large body flew as if hit by a car.
But, in the brief moment he let out a long breath of relief, Garum spun his body in midair and landed neatly on his legs.
Those pitch black pupils looked sharply at Daiki and raising a howl, the dog spit out a smashed bullet.
"Huh, how stupid! Bullets do not work on Garum!"
"Sh- shit!"
The cornered Daiki, pointed his gun to <<The Hell Hound>>.
Of course, it was only meant as a threat but -

"Hey, hey, you'll be discharged if you shoot at a minor without a warning shot, you know?"

Because of the spectator that gave unnecessary advice, the atmosphere was spoiled.

<<The Hell Hound>>'s face instantly became stiff with fear and was dyed red, his anger rising.

"Fe- Feel my threat! Do it, Garum!"

The red hell dog approached fast.

While resuming his flight Daiki glared at Kazuma but Kazuma received it with a nonchalant air.

"Ah, and then - ", he continued as if chatting.

"When you're facing someone with a <<Fire>> attribute, you had better not carry any combustibles. Using gunpowder is absurd!"

"Gaaah!"

As if matching their timing, Garm spit out flames from his mouth. The sphere of fire, big as a soccer ball hit the gun Daiki threw at once.

Kaboooom!

"Dowaaaahh!?"

Fragments from the gun that exploded in the air made holes in the wall, grazing his cheek.

"Hee....."

Except for his back, whether it was the wall or the ground, small holes were made here and there in his surroundings.

Kazuma stared at Daiki, trembling in fear, and let out a sight looking up at the sky. He blew up a large smoke ring and said:

"You suddenly destroyed your handgun after just being assigned. You should consider yourself lucky if you're let off the hook with a written apology."

"Are you a demon!?"

Daiki's scream bounced off Kazuma's tough skin and disappeared, vainly melting in the air.

And then, as if following that scream's reverberation, the deep crimson hell dog howled.

"Hey! Now it's not the time to look away piggy!"

Unable to stand up, Daiki dodged Garum's pursuit by rolling on the ground. Of course by doing so he wasn't able to continue protecting himself and gradually his small gashes multiplied.

"Gyahahahahaha! Kill him Garum! I'll bring the piglet's head to Pandemonium and level-up to a High Class!"

<<The Hell Hound>> laughed loudly. Kazuma made a wry smile, committing all the words to memory.

"Point. Pandemonium. High Class. Geez, what sort of game is this?"

But, this was done very cleverly. Concepts one would flinch from if told directly, by replacing them with game terminology, the sense of reality was lost, just like the sense of impeding crisis.

Even this <<Hell Hound>> evidently didn't understand what he was doing. Because of the game-like sensations he wielded his power, hurt people, destroyed things and as a compensation his soul was reaped.

"Will you die first?"

Looking at Garum, leaping for the finishing blow, Kazuma let out a dry whisper.

Did he think he won with this.........?

"Hiii!"

Garum bared his long fangs at Daiki's throat, curled in terror. But the moment he tried to tear up the tender flesh, darkness was born before the hell dog's eyes.

"Gaaah!?"

A complete darkness, without a ray of light. It seemed as if it suddenly corroded the space and instantly wrapped around Garum and disappeared without notice.

Together with the crimson hell dog inside.

"Buph......Gaaahh..!?"

He heard a damp pained cry. Without showing the slightest surprise, Kazuma looked over his shoulder in a calm manner.

There, an obvious spectacle was playing out.

"Guugh.....Guuu..."

<<The Hell Hound>> - that name was already obsolete, crouched down and mewling in pain. From the space between his fingers, covering his mouth, fresh blood was dripping out.

"Guhh....Garum....Garum!"

"Just stop that already."

Stepping up to the man calling for the vanished dog, Kazuma informed him coldly.

"You were completely devoured by that boy."

"E-eaten, you say.....My Garum was..."

"That's why, you're just a normal human until you'll manage to call another one. So come with us quietly because we want to hear everything you have to say."

"Sh- shit!"

The man immediately tried to run but after running a few steps, his feet gave out and he fell down. Unable to fall safely, his face crashed into the asphalt.

The fact that after a Jutsu is defeated the practitioner experiences a back-lash is one of the fundamental laws of magic. That's why practitioners constantly prepare on how to elude that reaction but it seemed this half-baked practitioner didn't know of that law. Which means he received that recoil flat and square.

But still, because his power was a sham, it seems he escaped the same fate as the dog.

"Where are you going?"

As the man was obstinately crawling trying to escape, Kazuma mercilessly kicked him.
Two kicks, three kick - only after confirming that the silenced man was not dead, he searched for Daichi.
Dragging along his exhausted short body, the child-faced beginner policeman was approaching.
Not saying any encouraging words, Kazuma heartlessly rebuked that unsightly appearance.
"Why are you dawdling? It's not like you were hurt enough not to be able to walk."
".....ou,gh"
" - Ah?"
"I've had enough! This job has no common sense!"
"No common sense? - are *you* saying that?", Kazuma retorted stunned but Daiki didn't listen, his eyes full of tears.
"Why are you looking at me like that? I took the police exam! Not the one to become apprentice to a magician nor to enlist in some army protecting the earth!", he screamed from the bottom of his soul.
"I just wanted to become a normal policeman! And someday become a detective, to participate actively in investigations and such...."
Finally unable to endure it any longer, his tears overflowed. While looking at that pitiful circumstance, using his power of imagination Kazuma recollected Daiki's figure after becoming a policeman.
Having been assigned one search case, the capable detective that bravely argueed with the brutal criminal.
"..........."
Thinking of the limits of the human body, he feebly shook his head. No matter how much he thought about it, that scene only reminded him of some cheap school festival play.
It was as if a middle school student was pretending to be a policeman.
"Well, dreaming is free..."
The reality was that Kirika, after having set her eyes on him, would never accept his application to change assignments. Same for a letter of resignation.
Even if he was an individual or a public figure, Kirika had that amount of power.
The Special Investigation Unit - it can be said it was already decided that Daiki would die in that place.

Isurugi Daiki was not a person born out of what was called a Jutsu-sha family lineage.
His father was an ordinary office worker. His mother was a housewife. He had an older brother but he too, was a normal salary man.

Daiki himself, didn't have any special personal history. He graduated from a reasonable private university with reasonable results and passed the police examination test normally.
During the interview, he spoke about his desire to someday become a detective.
But, that modest dream, or maybe his ambition resulted from not knowing his own place made him brilliantly flunk the test given before the police academy graduation.
The result that miraculous response gave was that he had the ability to sense the supernatural, to put it simply.
Without being asked about his opinion, he was assigned to the Special Investigation Unit, where he spent all his days as a human experiment, an activity called training.
And finally they found the manifestation of his special power.
<<Demon Eater>> - the power to make a hole in this plane and expel all devilishness to a different dimension.
He wasn't particularly eating them but, the blunt result of his power was commented on with *It's as if he's chewing meatballs* so the name stuck.
This power was conjectured to be the height of his abnormal good fortune discovered during the training, nicknamed <<Miracle In Disaster>>.
Although it was repeatedly called good luck, Daiki was not a lucky person. Rather, his usual luck was very bad.
When walking on the street dogs would try to bit him and bird crap always fell on his head. He has also a lot of experience with hitting his car.
But, when the bad luck that had befallen him reached a lethal level, that vector was reversed.
If a truck were to hit him, the wheel will suddenly turn and avoid his car. When he fell down, stepping on his shoe laces, a steel frame falling from a construction site hit the ground in front of him - those kind of things.
Well then...the question is what will happen if he were to encounter misfortunes that exceed his level of manipulation.
Just like what happened.
The way he expelled Garum, its fangs about to tear his throat, to a different dimension without doing so to the unlucky ringleader. That was perfect.
Although unstable, his power was as rare as a jewel. Regardless of what he thought, Kirika would never let such a talented man escape.
"Waaaa....how long will I continue to do this.....?"
It seemed he continued to cry. His words mingled with tears made Kazuma the tiniest bit aware.
"Isn't it until you die?"
He kept those direct words with no delicacy inside.
Although it's true he didn't do it out of compassion, it's just that he tried to avoid even more depressed cries.
Trampling down <<The Hell Hound>> under his feet, Kazuma ordered.

"Take out your handcuffs and restrain him. If this guy were to escape, the lovely Room Monitor lady will electrocute you."

"Hiiii!!"

Raising a turned inside out scream, Daiki arrested the man. It seems he had the experience of making Kirika mad.

Giving Daiki, who although slow tied the man's hands behind, a sidelong glance, Kazuma turned his eyes to the surroundings.

There were spectators. But, it didn't appear the man's accomplices nor others like him were present.

"We're finished for today, huh?"

It was still evening. As for the time, it seemed the real action will start from now on but Daiki was pretty shaken.

This was a power suited for extreme situations but if his mind were to close itself we won't be able to progress. Kirika was trying to cultivate that angle.

"Kid, drag that with you."

He was about to say they were turning back.

When *that* appeared in Kazuma's vision.

"........."

From Kazuma's awareness everything else suddenly disappeared. He unconsciously stepped forward and held out his hand, requesting.

She was there.

Her age was seventeen or eighteen.

Her chestnut colored hair fluttered in the wind.

Her almost transparent, white, flawless skin.

The girl he was never supposed to meet again. Even if he were to wait until the end of time, they were not meant to meet once more.

And yet, separated by only a few meters, *she* was there.

Her appearance unchanged from that time.

".......Tsoi Rin......."

He let out a cracked whispered. Hearing that, the girl slowly turned her head.

She looked at Kazuma with eyes the color of lapis lazuli, and then she smiled.

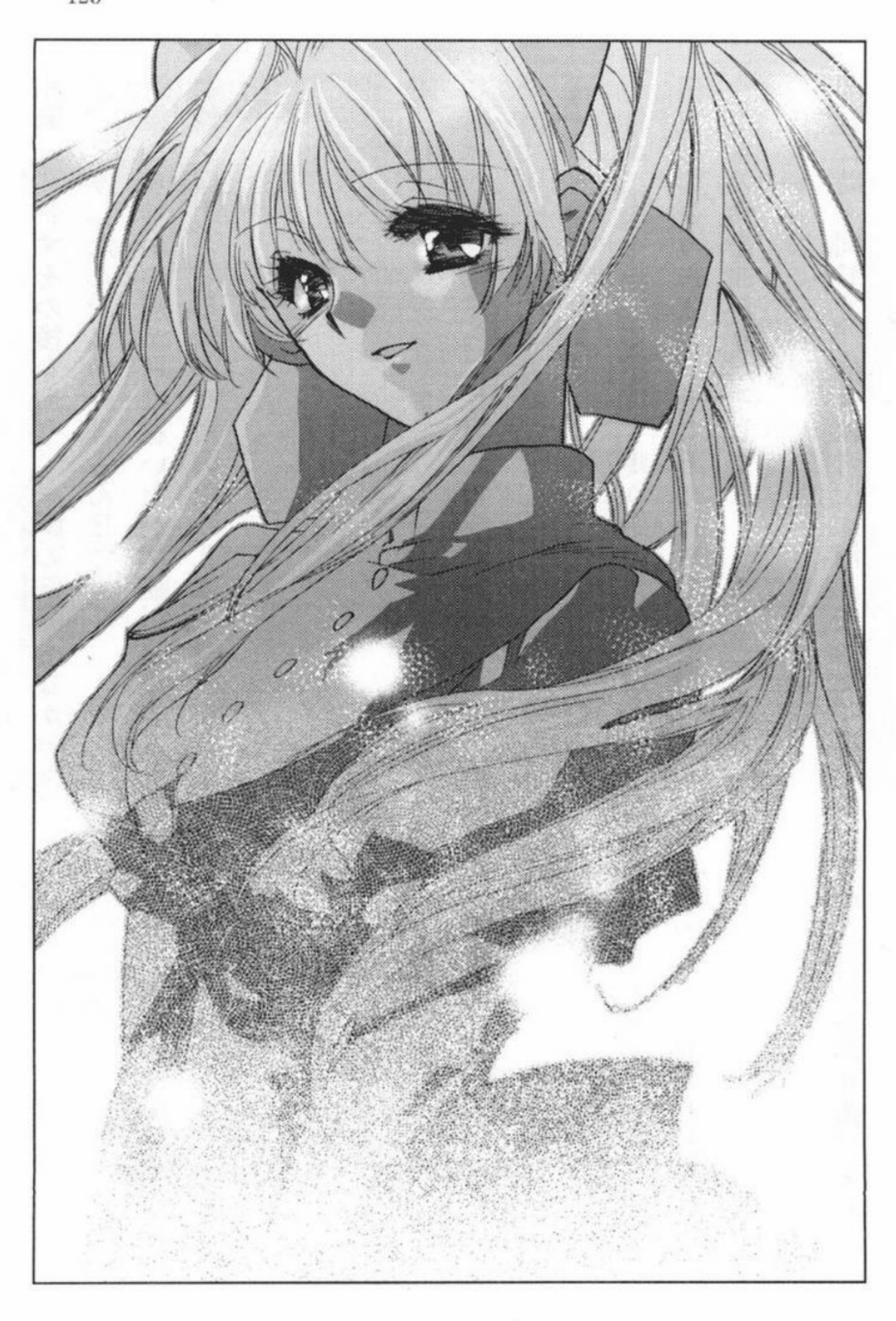
"........"

The fact that she used to smile this way, Kazuma remembered it just now.

He had long forgotten. The excessive vividness of that her face, separated by time.

In front of Kazuma standing there petrified, the girl smiled at him brilliantly once more and then she turned around.

"....Wait......"



Losing his mind, Kazuma chased after her. Without a moment of indecision.
"Wh- what happened, Yagami-san?"
From the back he could hear someone's voice but he ignored it before the brain had the chance to recognize it.
For him right now, nothing was more important than searching for Tsoi Rin.

He ran.
He ran.
He ran.
Kazuma earnestly just chased after the girl in front. Without thinking of nothing else. But even so, he couldn't catch up with her.
Five meters.
That was the distance separating those two. From the time they started running, without shrinking or extending it, it remained the same.
Like a mirage, chasing after the elusive girl, Kazuma ran. Pushing through the crowd of people, making a lot of turns, and then -
" - Hey?"
And the same way she appeared, the girl suddenly vanished. The street corner she certainly entered. Inside it was a dead end. But she was nowhere.
"What just happened....?", he murmured and finally Kazuma realized what he was doing.
He called out the wind. To the limit of his power. He searched for just one thing -
"Tsoi Rin...!"
But, the wind didn't answer. No matter how he he extended his search range, there is no response for Tsoi Rin.
"Did I see it wrong......?", he squeezed out the words like groaning.
Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing!
" - Ah?"
Was it several second, several minutes or more? In any case, that telephone ringtone called back the stupefied Kazuma. He looked at the terminal screen. It was Kirika.
"What?"
"It's not <<What?>> is it? What happened? Isurugi-kun came back crying saying you suddenly ran off to somewhere! Where are you now?"
In his absent-minded brain, an angry voice with a big volume resounded. Not yet able to freely use his cognitive abilities, he searched for a response to the last question.
His surrounding were composed of random tall buildings. He saw in his proximity a characteristic twin tower. It seems he ran all the way to the Government District.

Hearing that answer, Kirika asked once more.
"Did something happen?"
"......No, nothing much."
"Hey, hold yourself together!"
At that half-asleep like answer, as expected Kirika's voice became even more rough.
"I don't know about your private life but do your job properly! Because you were gone, the man we finally managed to catch escaped!"
"Did he let him escape in that state? What a useless guy."
"Just like you.", Kirika promptly replied.
With no place to object, Kazuma shrugged his shoulders in silence.
From the telephone, a deep, deep sigh could be heard.
"Anyway, come back at once. Because I managed to obtain Ayano-chan's cooperation, meet up with Isurughi-kun and come to the Kannagi Residence. Do you understand?"
"Aah."
"Don't drop off!"
Kirika cut off the conversation with those bitter words, without waiting for a reply.
It seemed she was very angry but, for Kazuma right now it didn't matter.
"What just happened.......?"
Murmuring so and looking up at the sky, Kazuma's consciousness was filled with the smile of the girl he met four years before.

Chapter 3 - Shinjuku RPG

Part 1

"Kazuma! I heard you made some serious blunder, huh?"

Meeting Kazuma face to face, Ayano said so, extremely enjoyed.

"Aah."

But Kazuma's response was an indifferent nod and without giving any reply he entrusted his back to the wall, his limbs idle.

"Kazuma.....?"

In front of that attitude she couldn't sport with, Ayano forgot the next attack she already prepared and called out to him in doubt.

Kazuma didn't answer. Not like he was ignoring her, more like he didn't even hear.

"What's this?"

She involuntarily asked Kirika but of course, she doesn't have the answer.

"I don't know - By the way Isurugi-kun, how long are you going to stand there, come sit!"

That was the first time Ayano realized she had another visitor.

If this man came together with Kazuma, it means it must be the *promising newcomer*. From what she heard, he was definitely twenty three years old. But he seemed at least five years younger.

He had an extreme child-face. Because he came here while running, his cheeks were red. He stood stand still outside the room until he was permitted to come in.

But even so, why doesn't he move even after being called in.

"Good grief......"

Kirika stood up with a sigh, briskly walked to Daiki and brought him in by the ear.

"Isurugi policeman! Open your eyes!"

"Y- yes!"

The intense pain and scolding voice, brought Daiki's consciousness back to reality. His muscles extended as if an electric current run through them and stood vertically in front of Kirika.

"Th- this is Isurugi Daiki, I have just arrived!"

"I appreciate your efforts but first of all come sit down"

Responding in a worn-out voice, Kirika seized Daiki's hand. And then pulled him down as if he was a child who lost his composure, making him sit behind her.

He was acting like a suspect in a crime - Kirika thought so seeing him stand on the balls of the feet .

But then, Kirika quickly realized that was a misunderstanding.

While fleetingly stealing glances at Ayano, sitting down, Daiki asked:

"Ah, errr...this miss is....."

"........."

Feeling the approaching headache at the too easy to understand attitude, Kirika pressed her temples.

Even if she said he was a promising newcomer, she couldn't help but feel a little ashamed.

Throwing a sidelong glance at Kirika, Ayano bowed with a graceful gesture.

"I was late in introducing myself. I am the daughter of Kannagi Juugo, my name is Ayano."

Her bow was polite and her salute very friendly.

All her gestures were, each and everyone, unimaginably refined and hugely different from the time she was with Kazuma.

"Y- you are?"

As expected, it seemed even he knew that name, his flushed face becoming nervous.

But, as the the face of the girl he was looking at smiled softly just now, his consciousness flew up to heaven.

"My- my name is Isurugi Daiki! I work as a policeman, I'm twenty three years old and single!"

Daiki returned the greeting in a much too excited voice, with a slightly different focus.

Maybe he was really planning for a formal marriage interview.

But Ayano didn't attack that happy idiot and bowed her head with a serious face.

"I heard about you from Inspector Tachibana. You are a newcomer that she has great hopes for in the future."

"N- no, how unthinkable! My power is almost like nonexistent when comparing it with the Kannagi Clan."

"It has nothing to do with the size of power. It's important what you can do and what you should do with your power. You can protect people with that power, right? I think that's something you can be proud of."

"Is- is that so?"

"Yes, of course."

Although clumsy, he talked freely for the first time.

"Appearing in disguise, huh?"

Kirika stared in admiration at Ayano's graceful attitude, so different from normal.

But in reality, this was how Kannagi Ayano appeared to the majority of people.

Without need of using the <<as if>> figurative expression she was the child of a genuine good family and it is obvious that she had a thorough instruction on etiquette.

As for Kirika, if their first meeting would have been different, they would have come in contact in a similar manner. As for Ayano, she's not aware of any sort of pretense. This is also the girl's true appearance.

But, in the middle of the pleasant talk, the flawless behavior made a slight crack. While nodding at Daiki's words, her glance seemed turned elsewhere, her lips sharp with dissatisfaction.
It was just for one moment so Daiki didn't notice. But Kirika didn't miss it. Turning in the direction Ayano's eyes just did, Kirika made a small, wry smile.
In one of the room's corners, in a posture with one knee up, Kazuma sits in silence without minding Ayano talking so cheerful with another man. Or perhaps, not even recognizing it.
"........."
Looking at Kazuma in such a state, Kirika's conviction that *something did happened* only deepened.
He wasn't a man with such an innocent charm as to behave jealously but normally he would at least make a few sarcastic comments on Ayano's elegant attitude and difference of standard for another.
But before she was able to investigate it, the conversation moved forward.
Kirika lightly clapped her hands and pulled back Daiki's consciousness, floating higher than the clouds.
"Well, it's about time we got to the main point. First Isurugi Daiki, report."
Saying that, Kirika stared coldly at Daiki, now coming to his senses and started speaking about the full particulars of his own error.

"What the fuck was that? Who was she or *what* was she?"
On the other side, Kazuma was completely ignoring the noisy surroundings, and was thinking about the girl he met.
She couldn't possibly Tsoi Rin. Even if that was a ghost, it wasn't Tsoi Rin's ghost.
But for some reason, he naturally accepted her as Tsoi Rin.
But, something was odd.
The fact is the girl supposed to be dead four years ago appeared unchanged was very abnormal in itself, what's more, he felt a somewhat uncomfortable feeling from her.
".........What was it.........?"
He compared the four years old memory and what he saw an hour before. The girl's smile he remembered in a long time.
Yes, she was a girl smiling with a carefree face.
Her cherry blossoms lips smiling broadly, making her pupils full of vitality sparkle -
"Aah, I see..."
Realizing the source of that uncomfortable feeling, Kazuma slapped his palms. And then spoke loudly without realizing.
"Tsoi Rin's were green, huh..."
That girl's eyes were lapis lazuli blue. Feeling good for finally settling the question, he finally became aware of the outside world.
And then realized that he became the center of attention.

A stunned Kirika. An absolutely bewildered Daiki. And then, because he uttered Tsuo Rin's name aloud, glaring at him with angered eyes was Ayano.
All three's glance, in different ways, pierced into Kazuma.
"Kazuma -" Kirika spoke together with a sigh.
"Did you hear what we were saying?"
"No, not at all," Kazuma responded honestly but the atmosphere couldn't be calmed down just because of that.
Kirika got the better of Ayano, whose eyes emitted a much more dangerous atmosphere and urged Kazuma.
"Just at the right time. Please explain today's fact from your point of view. It seems Isurugi-kun didn't understand anything."
"........I'm sorry"
Daiki made himself small. Everyone ignored him.
"Fine. But I'm telling you, I have yet to get to the bottom of this."
With that introduction, Kazuma started speaking about the circumstances of the fight with <<The Hell Hound>>. The meaningful words he spoke became the focus of the room.
"A class change at Pandemonium, huh? This seems more and more like a game."
After Kazuma's story was finished, Ayano whispered so in an amazed tone. But diagonally from her, Kirika kept quiet with a difficult facial expression.
"Did you thought of something?"
"There's also the site Shinomiya-san told us about. Something similar was written there"
"What you are trying to say is that this is not just <<The Hell Hound>>'s wild delusion?"
"There's also a possibility the people who wrote that think the same way"
Kirika replied so but she wasn't honest about that. The fact that she believes Kazuma's report and, the things written on the bulletin board as true, can be read between the lines from her speech.
But, that *truth* was not compatible with Ayano's common sense.
Piling up a great quantity of experience, that after exceeding a fixed number gave a level-up. If one were to raise their level even more, a class chance will happen and acquire a furthermore greater power.
"That sort of convenient power, where on earth can you find it?"
Finding a problem, Kirika opened her eyes wide in surprise.
"Ah, I didn't explain that incident. I'm sorry. Because I didn't hear from Shinomiya-san since, I didn't told you about that. Simply put -"
"Ayano-sama"
As if covering Kirika's voice, someone called Ayano from the hallway.
"What?"
At Ayano's short question, the servant replied with courtesy.
"You're wanted on the telephone."
".......Come in"
"Sorry to bother you"

The fusuma was soundlessly opened. Carrying a wooden tray the telephone was placed on, the yet young servant quietly entered.

"Who is it?"

"Someone called Suzuhara."

"Suzuhara?"

Without having any idea who that is, Ayano was puzzled.

"She said she was Ren-sama's classmate."

"Ah, Kanon-chan? - And you -"

While remembering the girl with adorable looks and lively character, Ayano looked at the servant frowning.

The ones serving the Kannagi family obviously know the Clan's occupation and the importance of that duty.

Even if he was a servant, a blockhead that interrupts a meeting for a personal call has no qualifications to work in this household.

But, not realizing he was on the verge of unemployment, the servant continued his words blandly.

"It seems an emergency. She said Ren-sama is missing."

"- Tch! Father?"

"Of course. As well with Genma-sama." **(!)**

While answering frankly, the servant held out the tray. Ayano gripped the phone as if tearing it off.

"Hello?"

Coincident with Ayano's word, an upset voice flew in like a torrent.

"J- just calm down. Tell me what happened since the beginn - he disappeared? Suddenly, in front of your eyes? At Tokyo's Government Office? Why were you - Pandemonium?"

That last word frozen the already strained atmosphere of the room.

In the still as death space, only Ayano's voice resounded for a long time.

Part 2

Seiryou Private Academy - this campus built not far of from the Imperial Palace, is a private prestigious school from middle school to senior high school.

With a tradition exceeding a hundred years, it's valued highly for yearly producing successful applicants to national universities with achievements in various fields, a school where a large number of *children from respectable families* attend.

And then, on the list of names of freshmen from that Seiryou Gakuen Middle School division, there are Kannagi Ren and the name of that *friend*.

After school.

One boy approached the girl stuffing textbooks in her bag.

"Kanon -"

Being addressed with overly familiarity, the girl, Suzuhara Kanon turned over her shoulder with a sharp look.
"Do you have some business with me, Takamatsu-kun?"
Her tone was by no standard in a good mood but the boy called Takamatsu didn't notice and drew closer with a smile.
"Don't talk to me in such a reserved manner, call me Takashi. I'll also call you Kanon."
It seems that this boy, although a junior high school student, didn't learn any kind of etiquette until now. After not using honorifics and calling her *you*, Kanon raised her eyebrows.
"Let's stop somewhere on the way home. The UFO catcher is my specialty. I'll catch whatever you fancy."
While saying so, he casually touched her shoulder. In Kanon's mind Takashi's death punishment was decided.
With a light breath she softly brushed Takashi's hand, the one touching her shoulder, and then -
"Aghyaaah!?"
She sized his middle finger and bent it backwards with all her strength.
Falling to his knees with an unsightly scream, he received a kick on top of his shoulders and rolled on the ground.
"Hey, Takamatsu-kun?"
Kanon overlooked with a cold-hearted gaze Takashi, laying down with his face up.
"As it seems you don't know much about the manners of the world, I'll teach you but don't you think it's very rude to address a person you're not intimate with without using an honorific title?"
Sweeping the shoulder Takashi touched, whipping her hands with a handkerchief and even going as far as throwing that handkerchief in the garbage can - that three layered combo pointed out her real intent: *I don't want to be touched by the likes of you* and relentlessly delivered the final blow.
"If you want to chase after girls, you'd better improve your character. Because your face cannot compensate for your vulgar nature."
It was a blunt way of talking but from the classroom there could be heard snickers from here and there. It seems Kanon was not the only one who thought this boy was pushy.
"Y- you...."
"Ah, Ren-kun!"
Kanon looked at the moaning Takashi as if he was filth but the instant she recognized the boy at the entrance of the classroom she transformed to a girl in love.
Immediately forgetting about Takashi's existence, she rushed over with a light manner of walking.
"Re - n -kun!"
"Ah, Suzuhara-san. Did something happen?"

Without showing signs of faltering at the approaching beautiful girl, Ren grinned. Kanon, that seemed about to embrace him, stopped in her tracks, her face changed.

"Ren, kun......?"

"What?"

Intently watching Ren, softly smiling, Kanon thought:

"As I thought, he changed."

At almost the same time the new school term started, Ren took a long break. And then when he returned after half a month, he was exhausted, like a different person.

He almost never answered when she accosted him. He wouldn't laugh.

His eyes were dead.

In order to recover his smiling face, Kanon exerted herself greatly. It was annoying but she called her bitter enemy and joined hands with that homo bastard.

But it was useless.

Eventually, the graduation ceremony came and without laughing Ren left school. She knew they were going to the same junior high school but she remembers thinking that she will never see him again.

It seemed that was needless anxiety because when they occasionally met during the spring break Ren was laughing almost normally.

"But still, something is different."

She recognized it every time she saw him. He seemed recovered but something changed inside Ren. Although he was only five centimeters taller than her, he seemed big for some reason.

He was still gentle but she couldn't drag him along anymore. Although he drifted away, he would definitely not cross over a certain line - she felt that sort of flexible power.

Just like now. Although she would have simply hugged him before, right now he wouldn't tolerate it.

Something happened. Something related to the unique occupation of the Kannagi Family. A situation she couldn't comprehend deeply injured Ren's delicate heart. And by overcoming it, Ren became stronger.

She thought that side of Ren was cool too. But at times he seemed in a faraway place. *Was it possible she can't reach him anymore?* - she had those kinds of thoughts.

"That's not true, right?"

She fleetingly looked up at Ren with upturned eyes. Realizing the serious light dwelling in her gaze, Ren directly stared back at Kanon.

"Suzuhara-san, did something happen?"

"- No, it's nothing."

Kanon replied as bright as possible and boldly clung to Ren's arm.

"Su- Suzuhara-san?"

"I told you to call me Kanon."

Embracing Ren by pushing her chest against his arm, Kanon drew closer.

"Eh, well, but......"
Exasperated by Ren's bright red face, Kanon puffed out her cheeks.
"Ugh, if I don't do something nothing will change!"
Without shying away from the public gaze, she was thinking of forcing herself on him right on the spot. No, if she were to bring him like this to a deserted place -
"- Hey"
But that anticipation, unimaginable on a twelve year old girl, was obstructed by an impolite intruder. Looking over her shoulder without bothering to hide her displeasure, Kanon demanded an explanation in a thorny tone.
"Ara, Takamatsu-kun, do you still have some business with me?"
Takashi only looked at Kanon without answering and came near Ren. While their noses were almost touching he stared intensely at Ren's features and sneered with open disdain.
"That's what you like, Kanon? A man without redeeming features but his face?"
"What are you trying to say, Ren-kun is very smart. Or did you forget his speech as the freshman's representative?"
"Sh- shut it!"
Having his best effort at sarcasm easily retorted, Takashi was enraged. His eyes, red with anger, seized the surprised Ren who had not understood the situation.
He thought of targeting the short boy that seemed unrelated to fighting, a target fit for a diversion.
He quickly seized the nape of his neck and yanks it up, attacking him with a brutal countenance. '*(!)*
"You're so composed! Why, there's no value in dealing with the likes of me, huh? Do you want me to hit that pretty face of yours, ahhh?"
"......Huh......."
Blinking at the sudden incident, Ren earnestly tried to communicate.
"It's Takamatsu-kun, right? I'm sorry but I don't understand why you are so upset? Could you please explain the situation before resorting to violence?"
"I can't, you idiot!"
While shouting close to his ears, Takashi hardened his fist and struck.
But that fist was returned next to Takashi's torso, before reaching Ren.
"Wha -"
"Stop right there. If Ren was serious the likes of you are nothing but a pushover."
The man that appeared unexpectedly in the background wrung Takashi's neck. Seeing that man, Kanon murmured unpleasant from the bottom of her heart.
"You came although I didn't call you, huh..."
"Humph, if it's for Ren I'll rush over from the end of the earth!"

Retorting a slightly complicated answer, the man threw out his robust chest. While looking over that dialogue that will never reach a common point with a tired face, Ren said.

"Serisawa-kun...please let him go. It must be painful, right?"

"Ah? Ah - sorry, sorry."

With an awkward smile the man released Takashi, who was about to stop breathing.

While coughing, Takashi scowled at the man who asked for trouble.

"Y- you.......ah?"

But, even by turning his face, he cannot see the man's face. A black wall, completely blocking his field of vision - after realizing it was the chest of the man wearing the high school uniform, he looked upward.

He was huge.

Taller than him by at least twenty centimeters. Meaning that although he was a first year student he was taller than a hundred and eighty centimeters.

In the entire class - no, the entire school there wasn't another one like this kind of guy.

"Se- Serisawa......"

"Yo."

With a broad grin the man - Ren's friend since middle school, Serisawa Tatsuya tightly held Takashi's head.

Gripping his small head with one hand, his huge arm as if ready to crush his skull as it is.

"Uugii.......gaah, ahh......."

Drawing near to Takashi's face, who was groaning in pain, Serisawa showed a ferocious smile.

"Listen! If you have a bone to pick with Ren, I'll be your opponent first. Try remembering that!"

While saying that he shook Takashi's head and heaved him. And then, without sparing a look for the boy flowing in the air, smiling with the whole face, he turned to Ren.

"Hey, Ren. You're not hurt right? I mean, that's impossible. Wahahahahaha"

With a lively laugh, Serisawa approached Ren. But Kanon stood in his way.

Looking up at Serisawa with a cold gaze, Kanon informed him.

"Thank you very much. Now that the nuisance is out of the way you can go back to the zoo. Your wife, the female gorilla, must wait for your return."

"Wh- who's a gorilla you stupid bitch!"

"You, of course it's you! Don't you think anything about being so big at only twelve? If it's not a gorilla, your ancestor must be some sort of anthropoid so please let some research institute have you!"

While looking over the quarrel he had no place in, Ren let out a small breath trying not to attract attention.

Although this kind of thing happened frequently during middle school, all the same he didn't predict it would continue even now. Leaving Kanon aside, nobody imagined Serisawa would be able to enter Seiryou Gakuen.

Since Serisawa was a really poor student except athletics, just how much effort he put to pass the entrance examination.
That noble endeavor and the conclusion that seemed the favor of gods was rumored to be some *miracle of love*.
Though honestly, Ren would rather have that part forgotten.
But even so, not satisfied by only passing the exam and also being in the same, maybe Serisawa really had some divine protection.
What's more, since Kanon was also in the same class, that goddess of love must have had a black tail hidden underneath her white robes.
"Ren is hanging out with me!"
"Don't be stupid! He's coming with me!"
While Ren was trying to escape from reality their quarrel continued. And at that point they were contesting who is taking Ren on an after school date - without even asking for the feelings of the person himself.
"Will I be able to stop then, I wonder....still......" Ren thought in a glum mood.
If he were to ignore it, it seems their dispute would really turn violent. As expected, he cannot ignore the damage to their surroundings.
Beside, different from the arguments between Nee-sama and Nii-sama, these two's argument was not so high a level that he cannot stop it.
Ren tried to console himself that maybe practising here will become useful in the future.
"Hey, listen..." he called out to them with as light a voice as possible.
Both turned their heads simultaneously. Controlling his urge to run away, Ren preserved his smiling face with great effort.
"It - it would be better if we all went. Instead of only two, isn't it more fun if it's all three of us, right?"
"................"
"................"
A heavy silence that hurt his stomach fell. Unable to put up with the sense of urgency, the fortunate students closer to the door plotted a speedy escape.
Compared to them, Ren was splendid. The cold sweat breaking out on his back didn't change his smiling face and he boldly received their glare.
After a long, long silence, Kanon and Serizawa lowered their pressuring gaze at the same time.
"- Well, if Ren-kun says so..."
"- There's no helping it."
Extremely unwillingly, they came to an agreement. Leading both of them, Ren tried to leave the classroom.
But a rough sound from the background stopped them in their tracks.
"Hey, hey, please stop it!"
"Shut it!"

A thoroughly angry voice. Without the need to turn around, the development excessively easy to understand made the trio exchange glances with wearily faces.

"Hey, just stop it already, you."

"Shut your trap, you enormity!"

Takashi shouted at Serisawa in a disgusted voice and glared at Ren standing next to him.

But Ren, who at twelve passed through numerous scenes of carnage, didn't feel threatened by only a violent boy.

On the contrary, not even recognizing he was being glared at, he tilted his head as is asking *"Why on earth is he angry about?"*

And then, there was Kanon.

She received head on Takashi's hateful glare and returned a scornful laugh. Her folded arms and raised chin and her facial expression that haughtiness itself didn't hide her contempt for Takashi.

"......You're making fun of me......" he squeezed out from the gap between his clenched teeth, grasping his fists tightly.

"Don't get conceited you bitch!!"

And then, he leaped at her while screaming. As expected Kanon wasn't ready for this degree of violence, so she was unable to respond.

Takashi grabbed Kanon’s shoulder and swung his fist. A second later, everyone was convinced the girl was cruelly hit. But -

"- Gaah?"



As abruptly as a spinning top launched in the middle of the way, Takashi was torn off from Kanon and pressed to the blackboard.
Because of that enormous power, the blackboard and Takashi's back started creaked ominously. With eyes growing hazy because of the pain, Takashi looked at the figure of the person who pressed him down.
"Ka - Kannagi........? No way.......!"
He couldn't believe it. That a boy much smaller than him could hide this much power. Because he was pushed up, he tilted his body was slowly forced up. Both his feet were floating in the air.
"Guu......Ha.....s - stop......"
Pressured by the fist grabbing him on the collar, his ribs were hurting. Trying to somehow raise a protesting voice, Takashi's tongue was frozen.
Ren was looking straight at him.
He was sharp, like a different person but despite that his gaze was carrying an intense anger.
His whole body tied by the power loaded in that pupil, Takashi shivered in fear at his wit's end.
"I'll be killed!"
He felt *death* closer than ever before. The fear of having a knife thrust at him seemed insignificant when compared to this.
It was the first time in his life his body was basking in the real thirst for blood. A precise, definite *intent to slaughter*.
There was no escape.
Calmly, composedly and certainly -
"This guy...will kill me!"
"Hi - hiii......"
But, contrary to his expectation Takashi was suddenly released from the restraints. The body that lost its support slipped off, rubbing the wall with a dragging sound and feebly sunk down to the floor.
"Eh......ah.....?"
Looking up in a daze, he saw Ren looking at his own hand with an air of bewilderment. And several seconds after, he showed a minor bitter smile while looking down at Takashi cowering at his feet.
"Hey...."
"Hiiiii!"
"You can't be violent toward girls."
The persuasion Ren made in a gentle tone, while Takashi was greatly perplexed, didn't add up.
"Hey, eh........"
While thinking what to do about that, from beneath Takashi's feet, squatting down, a strange liquid poured out.
An offensive smell.
"......Eh?"

"What have you done?"
Serisawa forcibly drew out Ren, standing rock still dumbfounded. And then he put his arm around his neck as if trying to strangle him and forced him along to a place where the liquid that kept on flowing.
"Your indoor slippers will get dirty! Instead of cleaning this guy's piss from my slippers I'd rather throw them away!"
"Th- then that really was..."
Finally comprehending the nature of the smelling liquid, Ren's face became pale.
Looking at Takashi he saw that his body was still curled up. The reason why he was trembling was probably not only fear.
Incontinence - a boy that was already a junior high school student never felt so much shame. And, realizing all this Ren started speaking very upset.
"I'm, I'm sorry! I, didn't mean to.....I'll call Sensei immediately so - "
"- Ren"
Striking Ren's shoulder, Serisawa feebly shook his head.
"If you feel even a little pity for this guy, don't say anymore. Just leave him alone"
"Eh, but - if it stays like this it will seem I bullied him. And people who torment others are the worst."
Ren didn't say it with malice. He didn't but the consequence of those words was to break into small pieces the already wounded pride of Takashi.
As if whipping the dead or salt was rubbed into his wounds Takashi's body shivers worsened.
"Are - are you ok?"
Perceiving that reaction, Ren flustering rushed over to Takashi. He touched the trembling body.
".........!?"
That extended hand was flung off as far as possible. Ren's eyes blinking in shock were pierced by eyes full of murder.
"Son of a bitch..."
Raising a face full of tears and snot Takahashi glared at Ren with as much hatred as he could muster.
"Remember this, son of a bitch! My brother is really strong! He can kill the likes of you with one attack."
"Waah, how lame," Kanon commented scornfully.
"If you can't, will you run to your Onii-chan, huh? I wonder just what sort of person that is?"
"Shut up!" screamed Takashi with a voice turned inside out.
"Now it's the time to pull back you know! My Aniki has supernatural powers! He'll turn the likes of you into ash!!"
For a second the class was enveloped in silence. And then -
"Bahahahahahahahahahaha!!"
The classroom was shook by a maelstrom of very loud laughter.

"Were - were you serious just now, Takamatsu-kun? Are you saying that seriously?"
"And on top of that you are one of those who believe crop circles are made by aliens too, right?"
While striking desks and walls, and stamping their feet, the students unanimously ridicule Takashi.
But without bothering with their reaction Takashi only glared at Ren.
"Just go ahead and laugh. Make fun of me. Get cocky just because you're somewhat good at fighting...because I'll teach you that such things are helpless in front of absolute power!"
"You're the one who you cocky, stupid," spit out Serisawa tiresomely, throwing the black board eraser at Takashi who talked on and on in ecstasy.
His right hand was already loaded with the next eraser.
"Se - Serisawa! You'll do it, too? My Aniki will - "
"Shut the fuck up!"
Without hesitation Serisawa threw the other blackboard eraser with all his strength. The chalk powder sticking to the blackboard eraser hit Takashi in the face and the angry face already flushed deep red was dyed pure white.
Simultaneously, white smoke spreads like an explosion, and the boy who inhaled the dust convulsed with all his strength.
"I'm telling you to bring your brother! Because I don't have all day, you know!"
"You - you bastard....."
Spontaneously, ignoring Takashi trying to spit out the words while having a coughing fit, Serisawa pulled Ren and started walking.
"Well, this is boring. Forget about this and let's hang out. Where do you want to go?"
"Ehh, well..."
"I - I want to go to Shinjuku. I want to buy some clothes."
"Waah, do you think we want to go buy women's clothes?"
"I wasn't talking to you."
"What did you say?"
"Well, well, calm down both of you."
With a delicately stiff smiling face, Ren tried mediating the glaring pair.
"We should go to where you both want to go in turns. We have time."
The trio started deciding their after school activities enjoyed. It seems that inside their heads not a particle of Takashi's words remains.

"Then, Shinjuku is our first stop right?"
"Yeah."
"Right."

Gaining both their agreement, Ren started walking with a visibly relieved expression.
Behind him, as if his existence itself was thoroughly forgotten, there was the solitary figure of Takashi, crouching. His gaze, carrying the dark flame of hate saw off Ren's distant back without even blinking.

Part 3

The game center the trio left was illuminated by the red sunlight of the evening. Feeling relief when released from the noisy environment, Kanon let out a small breath. And then she snuggled up to Ren like it was usual.
"Which reminds me, Ren-kun was really cool back then."
While clinging to Ren's arm, Kanon recalled the gallant figure of the boy that overwhelmed that failure of an idiot.
"Wasn't it the first time you acted like that in school?"
Kanon was familiar with Ren's strength. She understood that even a juvenile delinquent that took pride in fights couldn't go against him.
But Ren didn't try to display his own strength. Rather, he was actively trying to avoid that kind of situation.
Unrelated to his ability, he hated conflict. That's why before it could turn into a fight he tried to express his opinion and while taking the hit he would only counterattack to defend his body.
Although *protecting Kanon* was a just cause, Ren honestly thought it was inconceivable of exerting violence on boys his age.
"Ahh, yeah......."
Ren also thought his behaviour was strange and spontaneously expressed a bitter smile.
"I must definitely apologize to Takamatsu-kun later."
"I don't really care about that idiot but did you change your policy?"
"Policy huh, I didn't have such an exaggerated thing from the beginning. I just hate unreasonable violence, that's all. But when I thought Kanon-san was about to be hurt, I couldn’t control myself - is what you call *to snap*, right?"
"Ehh....."
At those unanticipated words, Kanon’s cheeks were dyed red.
"Th- th- that means, I'm important enough for Ren-kun to spontaneously lose his temper for me?"
"Yes."
As if talking about an obvious thing, Ren smoothly agreed.
"You are important. I wish Suzuhara-san were happy. I want you to smile. That's why, I'll protect you - I don't want to lose anything anymore."
"Ren-kun -"
Overcome with emotion, Kanon embraced Ren. But just before she could, a huge hand like a glove covered Kanon’s face. And then, forcefully tore her off.
"What are you doing, you -"

"No, well, Ren said it was for a friend."
Interrupting Kanon who was about to swear, Serisawa praised Ren with an unnaturally bright expression.
"Of course, if I were in a pinch Ren would help me too, right? Because we're friends."
"Ehh...? Y- Yeah. But I cannot imagine Serisawa-san getting in a tough spot."
"That may be true. But, at that time I will trust in you when the time comes, *friend*."
Striking Ren's shoulder Serisawa shifted his focus to Kanon. And then, raised his lips extremely enjoyed.
"I'm so glad for you, Kanon. Ren protected you *as a friend*. You are mutually good friends. I'm sure your friendship will last *all your life*. We'll *alwaaaaays* be friends, right?"
"..........."
Kanon glared at Serisawa with an extremely angry expression. Most likely, she was butchering him inside her head in hundreds of different ways.
She grasped her slender white fingers strongly as if trying to choke something.
"..........Just bring it on!"
"Ke ke ke ke ke ke."
Serisawa responded at the groaning Kanon with a loud laughter. In the space between them, invisible sparks were scattering.
"He- hey, calm down both of you!!"
Becoming aware they were attracting attention from the surroundings, Ren tried to mediate the duo. But, his gaze went around as if making sure of something.
"- Be quiet, both of you."
Sensing the alteration in Ren's tone, both his friends quickly became silent. At almost the same time, a single man drew closer.
Wearing an LL sized T-shirt that reached the middle of his tights and loose half pants - the person himself probably thought he was cool but the people who didn't have the same values could only call him untidy.
"Kannagi Ren?" the man asked shortly after, looking down on Ren.
"And you are?"
"It doesn't matter who I am. There's someone who has business with you. Follow me."
"I refuse."
"Aaah!?"
When Ren flatly rejected him the man tried to overpower him from right overhead.
"Who the fuck asked for your opinions!? Shut up and follow me or I'll kill you, damn brat!"
"I have no intention of obeying the likes of you, no matter what you say. Let's go."

Replying in a resolute manner, Ren urged Kanon and Serisawa on and started walking.

"...You bastard......."

Treated trivially by a middle school kid with feminine features, the man was quickly enraged. Drawing near the trio he seized Kanon’s neck.

"Don't underestimate me, damn brats! What happens to this woman- !?"

Unable to finish his speech, the man fainted in agony. The fist trusted into the pit of his stomach made him unconscious and he crumbled down before understanding what happened and who did this to him.

"Are you OK?" asked Ren pulling out the fist that was buried up to the wrist.

Kanon nodded without showing any disturbance.

"Yes. But, who is this guy?"

"Well, I don't know. But I don't remember becoming enemy to this kind of people -"

Closing his eyes partly Ren searched for presence in the surroundings.

They were surrounded.

Their clothes were different but they were approximately the same age and above all the boys had in common a wild presence while surrounding them.

They thought they weren’t yet detected so they slowly reduced the encircling net.

Ren informed Kanon in a small voice.

"For now we had better escape. Can you run?"

"Yeah. I'll do my best," Kanon nodded.

Next he made an eye signal at Serisawa, synchronizing their timing.

Just before the men moved, forestalling their movement by a second, Ren grabbed Kanon and started running.

"Move! Move! Move! "

Serisawa sent the men standing still, and taken by surprise, flying spendidly. Ren and Kannon nimbly ran through the hole that opened in the net.

"Shit! Don't let them escape!"

While being chased by harsh voices and more than ten footsteps the trio started running at high speed.

"Shit! Just how many are there?" cursed Serisawa while moving his legs determinedly.

From that point on, the trio weren't able to run from the men's pursuit for more than ten minutes.

They didn't understand why such a group of people were pursuing Ren, but it seemed there were more of them than those who surrounded Ren's group the first time.

The number of the men who ambushed them at their destination was already reaching thirty.

"Suzuhara-san, keep at it a bit longer," Ren murmured as if cheering up the girl who was short of breath.

Kanon was almost at her limit. By nature, her stamina was quite like that of a normal girl. When chased after by men with full grown bodies she couldn't possibly get away.

"This is bad.........." thought Ren, when he remembered the distance so far.

They were being herded. He didn't know the final destination but the men were clearly leading them somewhere.

But, even if he knew that, there was nothing he could do about it. Even though the opponent is an amateur, their numbers were too large. He didn't have the confidence he could defeat all of them while defending Kanon and Serisawa without using En-jutsu.

Gradually they were being cornered to a desolate place with a bad atmosphere. While thinking he should start preparing himself they reached the corner.

As expected, they were ambushed.

In the space ten men were lying in wait, Ren's group naturally plunged into it. From behind several other people were approaching.

They were completely driven to the wall.

"Ren-kun......"

"It's OK."

Grasping the hand of the girl who leaned close to him uneasily, Ren smiled.

"If I have too, I'll use my power. I won't let them even touch both of you. Don't worry."

It was strictly prohibited using Jutsu when dealing with an ordinary person. But he didn't feel like complying with such regulations if his body and the bodies of his friends were in danger.

Ren was determined that more than hurting others, he couldn't tolerate if he himself were to get hurt.

"Ku ku ku ku ku."

Unnatural chuckles drifted in the air and the crowd of people in Ren's front parted left and right. From inside it, a boy with a pompous attitude stepped forward.

"Ku ku ku ku ku ku ku - ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

The supressed laugh gradually raised its tension and turned into a laughing scream.

It was a face they recognized.

The face they parted from only a few hours earlier laughed, arrogant and proud.

"You can't run anymore, Kannagi!" *he* declared with an already triumphant air.

Before he came out, it was possible that Ren's group was scared. Maybe they had a vision of asking for forgiveness with a menial attitude. But that completely backfired.

A strange unknown *something* sometimes intimidates the human heart much more than a tangible, physical threat could.

For Kanon and Serisawa, who were not used to being involved in serious fights, the strange men that chased them without pretext were very scary.
But the moment *he* showed himself the trio understood everything. The enemy's true character, his purpose and the conclusion.
"Aaa - aahhhh, my hair is so messy -"
Completely disregarding *his* existence Kanon started arranging her dishevelled hair. And then, the moment *he* tried opening his mouth a second time irritated, she beat him to it.
"The peeing boy, huh? Did you change your soiled pants?"
"Wha - wha - ....!"
He - Takamatsu Takashi, while trying to say something to make him look better, his face was dyed bright red with anger and opened and shut his mouth to no purpose.
Serisawa sunk the boot in him even more.
"Which means, these guys are your brother's henchmen? I didn't really think you would call your Aniki. You’re such a loser, it's kind of cool."
"Sh - shut up! It's too late to apologize now! For the likes of you, in one shot, Aniki will -"
"Ahh - yes, yes. Just call your brother already - Where are you, Onii-chan with super powers?"
"Mo - mother fucker....." Takashi began losing it at the speech looking down on him from the bottom of the heart.
"That's enough, Takashi. Leave the rest to me."
"A - Aniki."
Hearing the voice that reached from the back, Takashi regained his confidence.
"I trust you, Aniki! Turn them all to ash in one go!"
"All right"
Replying with a reassuring nod, one man appeared. That silhouette stared at the trio - a pitiless stare.
He was most likely in the latter half of his teens. His hair was bright orange and was standing up. He was wearing black leather pants and a deep crimson leather coat.
Coupled together with the orange hair, his appearance was really standing out. So much that you couldn't mistake him for another even at a distance of a hundred meters.
Sneakily, Serisawa and Kanon started speaking but in such a way that the opponent could clearly hear.
"Hey, what kind of cosplay do you think that is?"
"I don't know but I saw that pose, when facing the camera, appear at O-Bon and the last year International Exhibition Hall. He doesn't seem embarrassed, huh?"
".....Hey, damn brats," the man growled, deviating from the plan, his temple veins showing.
After all, since he was Takashi's brother, his capacity wasn't all that great.

Seeing through that, the duo got carried away even more.
"Hey, orange head Onii-chan, who do you cosplay? A game character? Or maybe anime?"
"Is that bad taste coat your casual wear? Are you really walking around dressed like that? No way - I can't believe it!"
Serisawa laughed like a horse while Kanon covered her sneer with her hand. For a man with a pretty low boiling point that was more than enough stimulation.
"You sons of bitches! I won't forgive you!"
Raising an angry roar, the man released his *power*. The flame spirits drawn to him with brute force screamed in agony.
But as if not hearing that, the man kneaded the spirits being scrapped together.
In the man's surroundings, the air started flickering like a heat haze - and then, a deep crimson flame appeared.
"Se - seriously?" Serisawa murmured with a nervous face. Almost at the same time, as if trying to drown down his voice, from every direction cheers erupted.
"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah"~
"Kill! Kill! Kill!"
"Roast them! Colour them black! Turn them to ash!"
"Show us something flashy today too!"
Responding to the shouts of joy intoxicated in bloodlust, the man yelled.
"Yeaah, leave it to me!"
As if acting in concert with that scream, the fire gathered in both his palms. That curling flame raised its density, adjusted its shape and turned to high speed rotation fire bullets.
"Eat them, Fiiiiiiire Buuuuuleeeet!"
The man spread his arms on a grand scale and threw the two softball-sized fireballs with a sidearm pitch.
The moment they were separated from his hand, the bullets accelerated as if repelled. The fireballs that left a flight afterimage headed to Kanon and Serisawa with a speed impossible to evade.
"It's dangerous!"
But, Ren reacted instantly and thrust both of them away, removing them from the fireball trajectory. Ren evaded them by slipping through the space between the fireballs and survived without problems.
"Hooo, aren't you good! Being able to dodge the <<Fire bullet>>!"
"What the heck are you thinking!!"
Ren scowled with an intense expression the man who raised his voice in compliment.
"Openly using Jutsu in public - and even attacking children! If you're also a Practitioner, understand how moderation works!"
"Ahhh? What's a Practitioner?"
At the unexpected retort, Ren unintentionally became speechless.

Laughing scornfully at the petrified Ren, the man introduced himself loudly.
"I am <<The Fire Leader>>! The supreme monarch that controls fire! You have no right to complain, no matter who I burn! Because there's no one in this world who can order the King!"
Looking dumbfounded at <<The Fire Leader>> laughing loudly, Ren was voluntarily greatly perplexed.
"Waaaah, he's the worst.........this man is *dokkaku*...."
Dokkaku is a term derived from Buddhism and represents the people that made ascetic practices and reached Enlightment without the guidance of a teacher.
Of course, the truth that they barely managed to reach through that kind of process doesn't go beyond the impression of selfishness.
The same way, in the world of magic, the people who reached the manifestation of their power without any kind of instruction are also called this.
These kind of people, because they don't have anyone around them to compare to, have a tendency to think about their power as the greatest thing ever.
And then, they start a new religion by calling themselves *The son of God* and intend to exterminate mankind while under the impression they are *the pioneers of progress'* and tend heavily to behave like a tyrant.
The man that stood before him was a stereotypical example of that.
"Well, are you ready?"
Punctuating the moment with a wild laugh, the man lifts his power a second time.
"Thanks for tormenting my little brother! I'll burn all three of you! Eat this, *Phoenix Wing*!!"
<<The Fire Leader>> raised his hands to the sky. The fire spirits that were gathered beyond that point, embodied a bird in flames.
It was big. Its wing length exceeds three meters.
The phoenix moulded with delicate details like a living thing - and the heat loaded inside - Ren immediately saw through the fact that it was capable of perfectly burning three people to nothing.
"Get down!"
Covering up for Kanon and Serisawa, Ren confronted the fire bird. A huge quantity of heat that approached flapping its large wings. If a normal human were to take a direct hit from it would be turned to cinders. But -
"Disappear!"
At Ren's one command the fire bird scattered and vanished
"Whaaaat!?"
"Please don't get carried away. That sort of bluff jutsu doesn't even pass as the real Enjutsu."
"E - Enjutsu, you say..."
With a backward glance at <<The Fire Leader>> who murmured so with shock, Ren seized the broken fragments of the fire bird.

A slight pain travelled in his palm. *Something* mixed with the flame burned his skin.
Ren knew that feeling first-hand. A counterfeit pain that burned a regular human, the white hot sensation that polluted even the soul.
"Youki !? What is happening?"
Youki, the essence given by demonic beings - that is, the <<Ki>> of nonhuman life. It was something fundamentally different from simple evil concept like hatred, grudge and such.
It alternated the body of those with piles of experience, but different from the case of a black Jutsushi in the process of shedding his humanity, an amateur Jutsushi that only barely woken his powers was not supposed to be clad in it.
"- Let's go."
Finding it difficult to wait and see, Ren started a light attack. More than ten fireballs manifested instantly, leaving an afterimage.
The Jutsu composition and the shooting speed were both in a different league from <<The Fire Leader>>.
Unable to even recognise the fireballs, the man stood rock still simply dumbfounded.
"Waah!?"
But in spite of the fact that he clearly had not noticed it, from the body of <<The Fire Leader>>, a great number of flames were generated and intercepted Ren's Jutsu with unmatched accuracy.
Faced with the point blank explosion, the man finally noticed he was being attacked. For a little while his line of sight loitered around, not understanding what happened but abruptly he declared triumphantly, throwing out his chest.
"How naïve! Did you think that degree of offensive could knock down *Me*?"
The convenient explanation that his power was invocated by an unconscious defensive instinct seemed self-sufficient.
"........."
Ren ignored the man's words and reflected on the phenomenon that just happened.
That power was obviously invoked without the intent of the person itself. A Youki coiling around. There was only one deduction he could make.
"He's possessed by a Youma?"
The man who called himself <<The Fire Leader>> seemed only to borrow the power of the Youma that lived off him like a parasite. But as he was proudly boasting of *his own power* he clearly didn't realise that.
"That's nasty..."
It was not something that was possible to occur by chance. Without a doubt, someone deceived this man and turned him into the object the Youma occupies, ready to be eaten in the near future.
He couldn't let that be.

He was bothered by the fact he let his power rampage but this man was unmistakeably a victim.

But, in front of Ren who decided to save him no matter what -

"Still, you're pretty good. It's been a long time since I met someone who could defend against my power."

The man got excited by himself. Expressing a smile that was supposed to be daring, he spoke dramatic words.

"Your power has the same attribute as mine - <<Fire>> - but you're also a senior class? Enjutsu-shi, you said?"

"- Senior class?"

"Isn't that right? That Vesalius mother fucker hid the fact there were other classes. What about you? Were you selected? Is <<Enjutsushi>> a higher class than <<The Fire Leader>>?"

"Vesalius"

Ren bore in mind that name. It seems he was the one who made this man be possessed by a Youma and the name of the man he absolutely had to bring down.

"Just what kind of person he is........that man?"

"Are you playing dumb? Whatever. I'll make you talk soon enough. Don't get cocky just because you're a senior class like me! It had nothing to do with class and level - because I, **I** am the most powerful!"

"No, I don't care about that, about that person named Vesalius......it's impossible?"

Observing the man endlessly excited, Ren understood persuasion was meaningless. Reluctantly, he took a posture preparing for offensive.

<<The Fire Leader>> shouted.

"Gooo! The ultimate secret, *Flame Vortex*!!"

A crimson flame, coiling in swirls attacked Ren. Without shaming its mane, the ultimate mystery, its caloric value was fairly high - meaning, compared to the ones until now.



"- Really"
While letting out a sigh, Ren stopped the *Flame Vortex* with one hand.
"Wh - Whaaaaaaaaat!?"
In front of the flame pushed back at him, <<The Fire Leader>> opened his eyes wide in surprise. As Ren's own power was added to it, that seemed to change into a golden helix.
"Wa - waaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!"
At the fire torrent that filled his vision, <<The Flame Leader>> prepared himself to death.
Piercing even through his tightly closed eyes, the golden flame burned his retina. The feeling of scorching heat pierced through something in his body.
But the pain he expected to come didn't hurt him in the end. Timidly, he half opened his eyes and the golden flame was already gone without trace.
"Wh -wha - ahh."
Confused for a short while, he realised the unsightly shape of his body, curled down like a turtle, and stood up.
"You - you son of a bitch! Don't make fun of me! You speak so proudly, but your technique is nothing more but a bluff."
"This wasn't a bluff."
Intended to cool down the indignant man or maybe to provoke him even more, Ren replied with a serene expression.
"It played out just as it supposed to. Because from the start, I didn't intend to be your opponent."
"Whaat?"
"More important, answer my questions. What kind of person is Vesalius? From the process used to give you power, to the features of his appearance, tell me in detail -"
"....Mother fucker......." squeezed the man out through the gap between his teeth.
Finally he reached the conclusion that until now he was the only one excited and recognised that Ren didn't even consider him a worthy opponent.
"Did you think I was out and over!? Don't fuck with me! I am <<The Fire Leader>>! Don't put me together with some small fish!"
His body trembling in anger as his inflated pride took a critical hit, the man released his power.
"Shining Tooooooooooorrent - ahh?"
But, the white light tornado that was supposed to come out couldn’t be even glimpsed.
"Wh - what? I don't have enough MP? Then, *Fire Bullet*!"
It had the same result. The flame couldn't be brought forth. No matter how much he tried, he couldn't feel the response of collected power.
"It's useless," Ren informed the confused man.
"You have already lost your ability to manipulate fire. I got rid of it"

The essence of the Kannagi's power is the secret capacity of purifying and destroying all evil.
The flame Ren released before didn't affect <<The Fire Leader>> at all and only burned to nothing the demonic presence. Of course, the ability to manipulate the flame didn't remain.
"Im - Impossible! How on earth.......a seal? Or you neutralised it?"
"It makes no sense to play around with game terminology. It's time you face reality."
Those cold words were the sentence that ended the dream.
The letters <<Game Over>> flickered in his brain and the virtual character called <<The Flame leader>> vanished.
After that, only the human, Takamatsu Kyoshi, was left behind.
Ordinary and powerlessness, he was nothing but one of those many faces in the crowd.
"No......it's impossible......"
As Kyoshi trembled with the shock of loss, Ren slowly approached. Around him a golden flame flickered playfully.
"Hi....hiii...!"
Before the vibrant clarity, there was the sudden change of composition. Degraded to powerlessness spoils Kyoshi let out a wretched voice and looked up at Ren.
Ren was what he yesterday was. If he felt inclined to kill, he could easily kill him. Like trampling on an ant, just like he did before, very easily -
He looked around him. All the gathered underlings have fled, already disappearing without a trace. Nearby there was the silhouette of his brother, fallen on his back but it was clear he was useless.
"Do - Don't kill me........"
Without shame or honour, Kyoshi got down on his hands and knees, begging for forgiveness. For him, the man who lost all his power, there was no other way to survive.
"Anything.......I'll do anything..........so please........"
"Ah - Well......."
Confused by Kyoshi's sudden change of attitude, Ren unintentionally stepped back. Turning his way a gaze as if looking at an unstable man, he said.
"You have no power anymore, so I don't intend to hurt you further."
"Re - Really?" Kyoshi suddenly raised his face and shouted in a voice overflowing delight.
"Ye - Yeah. But I have some questions for you and I would be glad if you could answer them honestly."
"Ask me anything!!" nodded Kyoshi bracing himself.
Although the bizarre atmosphere increased a notch, Ren fired his question.
"Then, first of all about that Vesalius person. He's the one who gave you this power, right? Tell me everything about that."
".....Why, ask such a thing?"

When he heard Ren's question, Kyoshi asked back in wonder.
"Aren't you the same □ Didn't Vesalius gave you your power at Pandemonium? And then you class changed after increasing your level?"
"Aah - I'm the one asking questions □ "
Ren expressed an unsuitable *cynical smile* and gave a clumsy warning.
It was clear from his attitude that he wasn't used to this kind of interrogation but to Kyoshi who regarded him like his previous self, the effect was tremendous.
"Hiii - I'm sorry, I'm sorry."
Inside Ren he (involuntary) labelled Kyoshi's menial apology as foul play.
".........So, what is *Pandemonium*?"
"Pa - Pandemonium is......an internet site.......sir."
"No need for honorifics - Internet?"
"Y - Yes.......I found it by chance. And then I was asked: *Do you want power?* I answered with YES. I thought it was a joke. I thought it was a peculiar formality. And then an odd pattern appeared on the screen and when I looked at it I fell asleep. And then when I woke up I had this power. It's true. It's not a lie, believe me..."
"........."
Ignoring the tedious talk that seemed to continue forever, Ren looked at the man's facial expression. He did not seem to lie.
Meaning, if that was the truth -
"The Youma was converted to digital data and summoned through the internet?"
It seemed to resemble more and more a game, so maybe it was like that. That must be the truth.
In a word, this man wasn't used as a Youma sacrifice but summoned the Youma from his own volition and contracted with it. It appears that was the form it took.
Do you want power?
The moment he answered that question with **Yes** Kyoshi made the pact to hand over his soul.
Of course, it was a defective contract. Using this coercive method, even the soul of a normal person without any kind of protection from the spirits cannot be taken immediately.
But that applies only once.
The allurement continues.
Even if a person is not influenced by the devilishness, a human being that owns a convenient power desires even more power.
Without deeply thinking what sort of compensation will be taken from them.
Until the time everything will be taken from them, they will continue requesting power.
"I see......that was done skilfully."
Ren let out a murmur of admiration.

A trap set at random on the network. Kyoshi can't be the only victim.
Just how many people have offered their soul for an hour of pleasure -
"Wh - what........"
Suddenly calming down, finding fault with his ears, Kyoshi looked up with an uneasy gaze at Ren.
"Ahh, that's no concern of yours. Don't worry about it."
Ren casually waved his hand, obstructing the investigation.
"So, let's go back to the story. Let me see........first, tell me the address of this Pandemonium."
"I don't know it."
"........."
Ren stared very long at Takamatsu, who answered immediately. Overpowered by his glance, Takamatsu talked on and on, losing his head.
"I - I really don't know! While I was unconscious back then the connection was cut and when I looked at the history log there was nothing........everyone says the same, it's true!"
"Everyone?"
"There's an information exchange bulletin board for those like me, who received power from Pandemonium. That's what I heard there. There's no one who accessed Pandemonium a second time. We arrived at it by chance."
"What you say is that that site has no direct connection with Pandemonium?"
"Yes. The admin is the same as us."
Although experiencing some discomfort when hearing the word *us* as if it was said they were the same kind of thing, Ren asked again:
"The address?"
"It's in my phone."
"Give it to me."
After one glance at the phone presented to him, Ren tossed it into the pocket of his high school uniform.
"I'll keep this. I think that's all I wanted to ask but -"
Inaudible, Kyoshi let out a breath.
"As you wish."
"By the way, what else is on that bulletin board?"
"Nothing really important. After all, it's a gathering of guys like me who don't know much. So, stuff like reasoning about this power's true colours, boasts about level or ability, battle appointments and -"
"Battle? Do you fight between yourselves?"
"Yeah, because it has a lot of XP."
"XP?", Ren asked in return.
"We receive e-mails about how to use our power. Like *You received X experience points*"
"The sender?"
"It's Pandemonium. Of course there's no mail address."
".........."

"So, when we collect enough experience points, we level up. When we level up enough, we class change."
"........Are you one of the senior classes?"
"Yes. I changed class from the basic <<Ignition Man>> to the <<Fire Leader>>. It was very hard accumulating so many experience points."
"..........Is that so?"
At the excessively game-like setting, Ren was unintentionally perplexed. But, although the setting was clichéd, that's not an usual way a Jutsushi is represented in reality.
"But - What purpose does this -"
Ren can't guess the objective of this Jutsushi called Vesalius. What meaning does it have to mass-produce people with special power in those like Kyoshi, people without discernment?
Is he just a criminal who takes pleasure in people's reaction to his crimes?
Although he knew it was meaningless, Ren asked his only source of information.
"What sort of person is Vesalius? Tell me everything you know."
"Uh huh."
As if sorting his memory, Kyoshi cast his eyes down in silence. Patiently Ren waited until the man opened his mouth.
""He was a imposing son of a bitch. All his speech and gestures were theatrical."
And then Kyoshi started narrating. In more detail than Ren expected.
"Something like platinum blonde? He had long silver hair practically colourless and a red mask on his face. Because he was disguised I couldn’t see his face."
"That's very specific. You didn't meet him personally, right?"
"No, I met him."
"Where?"
"At Pandemonium."
".........."
From the story until now Pandemonium was supposed to be an internet site.
"Please don't tell me your spirit navigated in the Internet world □"
Normally he would laugh at this but in the present Shinjuku the common sense of the game world is overlooked. He couldn't affirm that it wasn't true.
But Kyoshi shook his head at that question.
"It's not like that. For a class change we had no choice but to go to Pandemonium. That's where I met him."
"................"
Ren stared very long at the man who concealed such an important piece of information until now. Pressed by that eloquent gaze, Kyoshi waved his hand in confusion.
"Ahh, I didn't particularly want to hide it. The order of the story, its logic, we still haven't -"

"Excuses don't matter. In other words, Pandemonium doesn't exist only on the Internet but also in reality, right?"
"Aaah. But I don't know where it is."
" - You still say that?" Ren groaned with a fed-up voice.
He imagined this would happen but still felt considerably depressed unable to track this down.
"N - No, hear me out! It couldn't be helped, you know?"
Turning a flattering gaze to him, Kyoshi defended himself desperately.
"I walked around instructed by mail, and before I knew I was lost and then I realised a residence with a Pandemonium written sign was in front of my eyes."
".........."
Letting out his irritation together with an exhalation, Ren regained his calm.
He understood getting angry right now was pointless. This clearly went exactly as Vesalius wanted it to.
Kyoshi's perception and cognisance, or possibly the space itself was warped so he wouldn't find out Pandemonium's real location.
It was impossible for an amateur like Kyoshi to go against such a practitioner who could exercise such large scale magic tricks.
"Have you seen something around Pandemonium? Or better, have you seen the outside scenery from inside Pandemonium?"
"..........."
With a face that seemed to have some clue, Kyoshi shut his mouth. With a smile Ren said:
"Keeping secrets won't help you."
".............It's not a lie."
After a few more seconds of silence passed, Kyoshi spoke in a sulky voice. At that *he won't believe me either way* tone, Ren returned a bitter smile.
"The story until now is plenty absurd already. At this point I don't worry about common sense anymore so please tell me what you saw exactly."
"......After leaving Pandemonium's terrace, I saw the outside scenery."
While still hesitating, Kyoshi started speaking slowly.
"It was Shinjuku, I think. But it was extremely high. I looked from the terrace of the second floor but I could see the rooftop of all building standing in a row."
"....So it was on the rooftop of some skyscraper."
"That's impossible. I don't remember using stairs or an elevator, besides -"
"Yes?"
"On both sides of the mansion, identical towers were built."
"Towers?"
Hearing such unexpected words, Ren asked back starring in puzzlement.
"Yeah. Those buildings were slender, towers of twenty stores at most. With entirely the same shape, left and right, they were erected as if to hold Pandemonium in between"
"Hmmmm......."

Without saying anything, Ren gave a half-hearted answer. Was there in Shinjuku such a building, one from where one could see the rooftops of the other buildings?

"H - hey....."

Absorbed for a short while in meditation, Kyoshi called out to him in a flattering voice.

"It's fine, right? I told you everything I know. Please let me go."

Looking down at the pitiful man with sober eyes, Ren quickly made his decision.

He asked him everything he wanted. He could be identified through his brother, so letting him go now wasn't a big problem. Besides -

"That's right. I'm sorry for taking your time. You can go now."

With a smiling face that didn't reveal his true intentions, Ren permitted his departure.

At that moment, Kyoshi ran away at high speed. Without hesitation he abandoned his brother and didn't turn around even for a second, that sort of commendable escape.

"Wa - wait for me, Aniki!"

After a few seconds, Takashi calmed down and ran after his brother. Of course, nobody was actually chasing them.

Part 4

"Was it OK to let them go?"

When the silhouettes of the brothers disappeared from view, Kanon and Serisawa approached from the little farther away spot they were watching the show from.

At Kanon's question, implying it may be dangerous to let them be, Ren replied with a smile.

"It's fine. They'll probably be arrested quickly anyway."

"Arrested? By who?"

"By the police."

"Wasn't the police unable to deal with magic stuff?"

"That's not true anymore. There is a department that deals with black magic and spiritual disaster. I'll report them today so they will probably be caught before the day is over."

Replying with a smiling face to Serisawa, who also joined the conversation, for some reason their faces became stiff.

"- What's up?"

"W - What, you ask..."

"Because Ren-kun wasn't so determined before,"

"Really? Then I'm glad. Because I can't continue being a spoiled brat forever."

Seeming glad from the bottom of his heart, Ren smiled with all his face.

Although faltering in front of Ren's unexpected growth and bearing, Kanon and Serisawa weren't mesmerized by that smile.

"So, what to do from now on?"
"Eeh, what do you mean?"
At Kanon's question, who already pulled herself together, Ren didn't have a smile.
Even if something must be done about this, he can't do anything about it today. For now he will return to the household and report this, and by using Tokyo MPD's Special Investigation Unit there's no choice but to investigate it.
While thinking that, Kanon looked up at Ren and showed a proud smile.
"You know, from what that guy said I know where to find that place."
"- Really? Where is it?"
But, as if dodging the question Kanon turned her back to Ren.
"What to do? - If Ren-kun will kiss me I may as well tell him........"
"Eeh........."
"Wait a second!"
Kanon's daring request was attacked by a threatening voice and an excessively huge leg. Kanon promptly prepared her body and escaped the huge foot sole, drawing near.
"......Hey, you're in the way"
Kanon glared up at Serisawa's large build, who blocked her way as if trying to protect Ren, with a penetrating cold gaze.
A glare that did not see a fellow human but an obstacle that must be eliminated. Her eyes were still.
But even so, Serisawa didn’t flinch. Fired up by the decision to protect his precious friend, he boldly opposed the evil witch.
"There's neither negligence nor chance. Because of this, you won't be alone with Ren anymore. You're too dangerous."
"It's not like I asked for your permission."
"Shut up, you harlot!"
Using random old-fashioned disparaging words that God knows where he learned them from, Serisawa abused Kanon.
"If you really think so highly of Ren, then I'll teach you not to use bargaining points with him. That's why I say women are dishonest!"
"Humph," Kanon faltered as he touched a nerve.
It was a fair argument. Even though there was lip service involved, it was still a fair argument so she couldn't refute it.
"Won't you tell me, Suzuhara-san ~"
What's more, Kanon had no way to resist to Ren's *request*.
"If you were to at least call me Kanon, I'll give you both my body and my heart."
"Aah......ahahahahahahahaha....maybe at a different time. All right?"
Disciplining his smiling face that already became stiff as Kanon drew near with a peevish expression, Ren smoothly recovered his serious look.
"- So?"
"It's just as Ren-kun was about to guess."
"Being on top of a building, you mean?"

"Oi, oi, don't spout such stupidity. In what world there's a building with raised from the rooftop."
Serisawa didn't notice yet. But taking advantage of those words, Ren arrived at the right answer.
A building with two towers raised from the rooftop - there was definitely such a building in Shinjuku.
"The Tokyo Government Office!"
At the involuntarily shouting Ren, Kanon clapped her hands giving praise to him.
"What? Aah, I see."
Late by several seconds, Serisawa finally noticed.
Towering over the Shinjuku's governmental district, the most important governmental office of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area - to put it simply this building had the form of the *Ou* (concave) character.
Having forty eight floors above ground, from the thirty third floor upward tho neighbouring towers reached the heaven.
Between the south and north tower there was a huge empty space. If they were to stand there they would definitely see the scenery Kyoshi described.
"But, there's nothing there...."
"How stupid! It can be concealed with magic. Right?"
"Yeah. Maybe."
"I know, right? Then -"
"No."
Kanon's delighted words, Ren interrupted them softly but clearly.
"From here on, I'll go alone."
"Ehh - But....."
"Suzuhara-san."
With a slightly troubled expression Ren called attention to the whining Kanon.
Sensing the solid determination inside that soft word, reluctantly, Kanon gave up following him.
"Take care, all right."
"It's fine. I won't do something so rash as going by myself. I'll just scout out a bit. Well then, see you tomorrow."
Assuring them he won't behave recklessly, Ren started running aiming at the Tokyo Government Office. Because he was in a hurry, after that trivial farewell, he never looked back.
That's why he didn't notice. Although seeing Ren off, without even looking at each other the duo exchanged accomplice smiles.
When arriving at the Tokyo Government Office, Ren asked the lady at the reception about his purpose - the space between the north and south tower.
But, the answer was ruthless.
As she said: "There's nothing there, you can't go there"

Of course, there is an entrance for work but right now he has no time to forcibly or maybe through political power push in. Ren left the reception desk and took the elevator.

Of course, the place of destination was the thirty third floor. The level separated in two was the lowest one.

If he were to go there, he thought he could peek at that place through the window but there was no window. When looking at the information board, he saw that one section of the opening turned into a conference room. As expected, he cannot enter it without permission.

"What am I supposed to do ? If it's the outside window will I be able to see it?"

The forty fifth floors of the Tokyo Government Office - both North and South, had a general opened window.

If it's there, it may be possible to see. After thoroughly investigating the thirtieth floor, Ren abandoned that method.

For one moment Ren returned to the first floor. It was impossible to go to the viewing room without taking a direct elevator.

Lightly greeting the elevator girl with a smile plastered on her face, he boarded the elevator going for the north tower. The elevator rose nonstop until the forty fifth floor, opened its doors again and let out the passenger.

When exiting the elevator, he met three people. One was another elevator girl and the other two were -



"Yo, Ren."
"You are late, what are you doing?"
As Ren involuntarily staggered, he hit his head on one side of the elevator wall. At that the elevator girl came rushing.
"Dear customer? How are you feeling?"
"Th - this is nothing. Don't worry about it."
Sending away the elevator girl by waving is hand, Ren looked at his two friends, that were supposedly prohibited from coming.
"Why are you here?"
As Ren pressed her for an answer, Kanon feigned thorough ignorance.
"Eeeh, Shinjuku sightseeing of something?"
"It's not *or something*, right?"
As expected she couldn't deceive him. Holding Kanon's glaze he glared at her with a stern expression.
"It's dangerous, you know!?"
"But I saw Ren-kun's gallant figure. And then you said there's no danger if it's only scouting."
"That may be true but...."
There is a discrepancy between what is dangerous for Kanon and what is dangerous for Ren. Understanding it was useless trying to explain such things, Ren shut his mouth. As they chased after him while pretending to go home it seems pointless to send them away now.
Accepting the reality with a sigh, Ren asked the question that suddenly came to his mind.
"By the way, how did you know I will be here?"
"There's no other place from where one is able to see, right?"
Kanon's answer was clear.
"You didn't discuss how to enter the place didn't ask and because it's Ren-kun, you wouldn't forcibly try to enter, right? That's why there was no place to go but the sightseeing room."
"But there's also a sightseeing room in the south tower."
"The other one is opened until five."
As expected, Kanon concluded with clarity.
"Although there's no question there's more than thirty minutes, isn't that what a person would normally choose? That's why we came to the north tower who is opened until nine."
Giving the impression *It's a simple thing, Watson-kun*, Kanon displayed her reasoning. Ren gave up raising both his hands.
"You caught me, Holmes."
"Fu fu fu....come here then."
Kanon started walking in order to catch Ren's hands. Serisawa waited on her path.
"I don't see from here. It's somewhat obscure."
Serisawa pointed at the window he occupied until now. Ren bent over overlooking that place.

Surely, it was hard to see. Although the north and south towers had an octagon shape, there was no window on the walls facing each other.
Inevitably, they had a forty five degree viewing angle.
But even so, when looking out clinging to the window, they could perceive all of the place in question. There were some bling spots but they could compensate for those from the window on the opposite side.
"...It's not there."
"It's not."
Already having confirmed it, Serisawa and Kanon separated from the window after a fleeting glance. Ren persevered a bit longer but unable to perceive any abnormality, he turned around as expected.
"Did you found something?"
"Nothing."
Ren lightly shrugged his shoulders. From the beginning he didn't expect to find out something only by looking.
As Ren is an Enjutsushi, he doesn't have the ability to see through a high grade concealment that can warp space.
"Then, what are we going to do?"
"Right. There's no point having come here just to go back like this. Maybe I'll push a little bit."
Surprised by the confident speech, Kanon unexpectedly opened her eyes wide. But Ren was sticking to the window again so she immediately pulled herself together and stood next to him. Serisawa followed naturally.
Overlooking the scenery underneath him, Ren concentrated his mind.
Is Pandemonium really there? And if it's there, by what means did it concealed its appearance? - Ren has no ability to smell it out. But still.
"There no need to see it. It doesn't matter if I can't grasp it"
The phenomenon induced by the Spirit Magic is not a simple natural phenomenon.
Kazuma's wind can tear open dimensions, and when Ayano battled with a gravitation user she managed to pull of the stunt of burning the warped space itself.
A strongly sharpened will can undermine the laws of physics. That is the quintessence of the magic foundation.
Even if he can't see anything, even if he can't feel anything -
"As long as there is something there - no matter what it is, I can <<burn it>>!"
A golden fireball was born in the air. Although it happened somewhat farther from the building, it was pulled from east to west leaving an afterimage and pierced the opening between the north and south towers.
Together with a faint response, a soundless noise reached back and the space trembled. And then -
"Ah!"
Spontaneously Kanon screamed.

For a second - only for a second, inside the flickering space an old western style house could be seen in the gap.

"Ren-kun, just now - !"

Ren nodded carefully, and separated his body from the window.

"Bingo !"

He had no doubt. The enemy's headquarters, Pandemonium, was here.

He cannot be involved with this game of slapping cards any longer. It was when he was thinking about returning home as quickly as possible and report it.

"Wasn't your knock a bit too rude, boy?"

From behind, a low and composed voice reached his ears.

Ren's field of vision, promptly turning around, was instantly enveloped in darkness. Just before his consciousness was engulfed in darkness together with his vision - Ren's shape disappeared from the sightseeing room.

Chapter 4 Maiden from the days of yore

Part 1

"Hurry up!"

"I know."

As if calming down the hurrying up Ayano, Kirika nodded carefreely. She fleetingly glanced at the rear view mirror, checking Kazuma's appearance that didn't move as if he was asleep.

She looked forward once again.

Approximately five minutes after Kanon's call, Kirika got into the car she was driving and they headed for the Tokyo Government Office.

Without Daiki. Although she said it was important to accumulate experience, it was still dangerous to take such an inexperienced fellow to the enemy's base.

To say nothing of the fact that right now Ren was captured.

If he were to become a burden - no, the moment he *will* become a burden it's not unlikely Kazuma will simply eliminate him. Or maybe, that is certain.

Therefore, policeman Isurughi was watching the office. It goes without saying he took over that duty voluntarily.

"Still another ten minutes, huh?"

Appearing not to hurry, Kirika was operating the car safely. The car model was a jet black GT-R. Just in case, it was a Tokyo MPD's Special Investigation Unit official vehicle but Kirika never let another person take the steering wheel. Remodeled by misusing the public expenditure, it was a car sample for intermingling the public policy with private interest.

"..........."

Ayano folded her arms, agitated, and glared at the seat belt that got in her way.

The time was past evening, the place was Shinjuku. Since so many unfavorable conditions piled up, no matter how skilled the driver or how fast the car, it's impossible for the car to run smoothly.

Just when they seemed to move the traffic lights changed to red and Ayano knitted her eyebrows in worry.

"Won't you sound the siren already and go across?"

"Please don't ask for that."

As if calming the irritated Ayano, Kirika said in a composed voice.

"We can't go public with this. You understand, right?"

Certainly it seems impossible to imagine how much of an uproar they would cause if they were to march into Tokyo Government Office with a patrol car ringing a gaudy siren.

She understood that. She understood it but nevertheless she couldn't calm down.

"What the hell was Ren thinking? To meddle with the enemy's base by himself!"

"But he didn't particularly have that intention, right? He only wanted to scout it out from afar -”

"It's the same thing!" Ayano retorted strongly.

Inside the car, Kirika already received a brief lecture. Connecting the information she received from Kanon, Ayano almost perfectly understood the Pandemonium system.

For that reason, she realized it. That the opponent this time was not an easy one. A Jutsushi that can freely use this much magic. Even understating him, it was clear he was elite.

Parading solo before the nose of that sort of opponent is reckless no matter how you think about it.

"Shit!"

"Settle down, Ayano-chan."

To the impatient Ayano, Kirika said the same thing the Nth time.

"The fact that he was abducted means he wasn't immediately killed. I'm sure you'll see him again."

"I know that but........"

"Besides, I'm not the one you want to say these selfish things to, right? When Kazuma comes back you can throw as many tantrums as you like."

"..............."

Despite frowning, Ayano was silent. Although he won't be pleased by furious remarks, it was an established fact she should wait until Kazuma's return.

She looked at Kazuma holding still next to her with a sidelong glance. That figure completely exhausted, leaning on the seat, seemed as if sleeping.

But of course, it was impossible for this man to doze off in front of Ren's crisis. Right now Kazuma was tuning his conscience with the Spirits of the Wind, and investigating the situation at the far off Tokyo Government Office.

When watching him so intently as if she was glaring, Kazuma suddenly opened his eyes.

Lightly looking up at the sky, he let a tiny sigh. And when he was about to close his eyes again, Ayano instantly detained him by holding his arm.

"How was it!?"

"The space above the Tokyo Government Office is certainly distorted."

"And?"

"I won't know more without going there."

Without saying anymore, Kazuma closed his eyes again. But this time, his presence didn't fade. He seemed to merely rest his body.

Understanding the report ended, Ayano shouted in a shocked voice.

"-Then, isn't that the same as not knowing anything!?"

"That's not true, Ayano-chan."

While handling the steering, Kirika put on a bitter smile.

"It means we know that, from the result of the reconnaissance, only that much can be found."

Ayano's eyebrows frowned with a twitch. As expected, she wasn't so slow as not to understand after having been spoken to like that.
"It'll be difficult?"
"Fairly."
At Kirika's question, Kazuma answered without opening his eyes.
The Barrier Kazuma spied on with wind - just because he was capable of constructing such a thing, the enemy's excellent ability was obvious.
At the premonition of a fierce battle, Ayano involuntarily clenched her fists.
After the car drove for five more minutes, Tokyo Government Office's panoramic view finally entered their vision.
In a straight line, the distance is less than three hundred meters. But they were stopped again by the red traffic light.
"Running should be faster now..."
The instant Ayano thought so, Kazuma moved.
"I go first."
"Wait!"
As Kazuma said so and got off the car, Kirika sharply called him to a halt. Kazuma looked at Kirika with an emotionless gaze.
"I'm not trying to stop you. I'm just saying it to know I said it - don't destroy the Tokyo Metropolitan Office."
"That seems reasonable..." Kazuma replied with an expression as if that was a stupid thing to say. But it was too early to be relieved.
"I'll be careful until I rescue Ren."
"Be careful after rescuing Ren-kun too!"
"Tell that to the opponent!"
Kazuma bluntly ignored Kirika's shriek-like petition. Coincidentally his silhouette faded like a mist and then - it disappeared.
By manipulating the density of the atmosphere, he turned transparent by distorting light. Kazuma's specialty was optical camouflage.
"Kazuma!"
He didn't reply. Already riding upon the winds, it seems he was headed for the Tokyo Government Office in a literally straight line.
He aimed to go directly to the space between the twin towers where Pandemonium was located without having to use the stairs.
".....!"
Simultaneously, both looked up at the Tokyo Government Office. In the upper air of the tuning fork characteristic silhouette they felt a frozen, enormous power.
"No way! Is he really going to wreck it!?"
While both women became rigid unable to do anything, their faces stiff, quickly, sharply, a gigantic power was released.
The distortion of space, the power that held that distortion in place was forcibly sliced and torn by a wind blade.
The recoil from the reconstruction of the warped space changed to a colorless, soundless shock.

"Is that, Pandemonium?"
The barrier had been smashed and Pandemonium, concealed at the bottom of that distorted space was finally exposed to broad daylight.
The number one central government office, Tokyo Government Office, this building that could be called the symbol of Shinjuku was joke-like enshrined in the gap between the two towers.
It was a scene that made one doubt his sanity. Although after several seconds the barrier reconstructed and that image disappeared, there are people who would have seen it.
"..........I wonder, will we be able to falsify this..........?"
Sitting in the driver seat completely exhausted, Kirika groaned.
Just as feebly, Ayano retorted.
".........Won't it be all right? If there's no evidence, you can settle it by saying it was an optical illusion, or if there are pictures you can say something like that was photo-shopped."
"Maybe -"
"Oo - Oi! What was that explosion!?"
Kirika's murmur, forcibly trying to convince herself was drowned in the man's shout. Ayano and Kirika looked at each other with tedious expressions.
What the man felt was probably the recoil from when the Barrier was tore open.
It was a non-physical shock but it seems it could be perceived by normal people with a good intuition.
".......For now, let's prepare"
Kirika took her telephone out from the dashboard and pressed the buttons. When it connected, she began talking without introduction.
"It's urgent, command an evacuation order for Tokyo Government Office. Eeh, who cares about the reason? Invent something adequate like we received a terrorist bomb warning or something. Do you understand? This conversation is being recorded, right? It will be pointless even if you tell me you won't listen!"
After powering off her phone she flung it in the passenger seat. She let out a deep, deep breath.
"Good grief..."
"What was that? The preliminary arrangements for a cover up?"
At Ayano's question Kirika replied in a worn out voice.
"That's also true but we can't disregard the possibility that Tokyo Government Office will fall, right?"
"Aah, that's true -"
Involuntarily Ayano looked up at the Tokyo Government Office with a distant look.
"Since it's *that* Kazuma, he doesn't seem to hold kindness for the guy who abducted Ren, huh?"
"I beg you, don't say it so calmly," Kirika whispered while getting away from the car.

"Because in that worst case, I have no one to rely on but you."
"........I'll do my best."
As Kirika said so desperately hoping, Ayano answered honestly.
Entering the Tokyo Government Office, the usual scene enfolded between their eyes.
"It seems no one takes refuge."
"..........That 'wait and see' son of a bitch....I'll remember this!" Kirika spit out unpleasantly.
Feeling a shiver at that subdued murmur, Ayano felt gratitude for that certain something that surpasses human intellect that didn't made her Kirika's boss.
"Aah, but, the sightseeing room seems closed."
She restored the conversation in a casual manner.
There was no line of people on the left and right direct elevator entrances but a closed sigh stood there bluntly.
"True......that's strange - huh?"
Looking around Kirika took notice of two children who approached them.
"Aah, are these kids...?"
This was the first time she met them directly but the duo was so peculiar it was impossible to mistake. As if supporting that guess, Ayano met them halfway.
"Kanon-chan, Serisawa-kun -"
"Onee-sama!"
One of those two, Kanon, clung to Ayano firmly.
"Are you still here? Didn't I tell you to go home?"
"But, but, Ren-kun is....."
"He's fine."
Lightly bending over so that the height of their eyes matched, Ayano showed a smile to bring her piece of mind.
"Don't worry about Ren. That boy is much stronger that what he looks like and a much stronger guy already left to rescue him."
"But...."
Unable to throw away her hesitation, Kanon mumbled. As if covering for her Serisawa opened his mouth.
"If you say it's fine staying here is....besides, even we can -"
"Don't be so irresponsible!"
With a suddenly changed severe tone, Ayano scolded them harshly.
"It may be heartless to say it but right now, there's nothing you two can do. If I am honest, you're nothing but a drag. If you plan to continue being Ren's friends, learn to discern whether or not you can say selfish things."
They had a life and death occupation. Not only they didn't had the ability to protect themselves but it was inexcusable to disturb the site with amateurs who didn't understand.
If both were those kind of *people without self-restraint* there was no point for Ren to associate with them like that.

".....I'm sorry......"
"......I apologize......."



Dejected, heads hung down, both spoke words of apology.
Once again Ayano showed a smile and embraced both of them lightly.
"I'll tell Ren to call you afterwards. Wait until then at your homes, OK?"
"- Yes."
"Is the conversation over?"
As if choosing the moment the children agreed - actually, seeming to lie in wait for it, Kirika approached. Ayano unintentionally scowled and glared at her.
"Please at least try to look like you are persuading them. Truthfully, this is your job right?"
"You could say that but I thought Ayano-chan was more suitable for it. Besides -"
Lightly eluding Ayano's criticism, Kirika focused her eyes on the children.
"The police was supposed to order evacuation, you didn't hear anything?"
"- Eeh?"
Kanon and Serisawa exchanged strange glances.
"No, we didn't hear anything. Aah, but the sightseeing room was suddenly shut."
"We've been in the lobby ever since but there wasn't a broadcast like that. I'm not mistaken."
""..........I see."
With a low nod, Kirika fired her gun in a deserted place. Perhaps in the direction of the Metropolitan Police Department.
"I'll ask for information at the reception desk. Ayano-chan, take the kids."
"Aah, OK."
Hearing Ayano's answer behind her, Kirika walked to the reception.
Looking at her appearance from behind with a fearful gaze, Serisawa asked:
"Is she perhaps, a scary person?"
"That's true. It would be better not to stand in her way today."
Responding with a faintly stiff voice, Ayano took both of them to the exit. Leaving the building together with them, she sent them off.
"Well, go home."
Kanon and Serisawa bowed their heads deeply in front of Ayano.
"Please save Ren-kun."
"Please save him!"
Cracking a smile Ayano assured them.
"Be careful when going home."
"Yes!"
With a vigorous nod, the children returned home. Until their silhouettes disappeared, Ayano waived her hand smiling.
When returning inside, Kirika was waiting in front of the automatic door.
"Let's go."
Recognizing Ayano's appearance, she started walking at a quick pace without explaining the situation. Obviously she was in a bad mood.
"Wait! The situation?"

While chasing after Kirika who headed for the elevator, Ayano asked carefully. Kirika replied without looking back.
"It seems an evacuation advice was given."
".......Aah, I see."
After a pause of several seconds, Ayano understood the meaning of those words.
Not an order or obligation to evacuate but to go or to stay as one pleases.
Since even the receptionist remained it seems they were informed the danger was pretty small.
But just in case, since the advice was taken, this means they have an excuse for that worst case.
"Shit, that's why they're being called incompetent government officials who can only protect themselves!"
"What will you do ~"
"There's no other way. We can only take care so that the building won't collapse by ourselves. Let's hurry."
They quickened their paces even more. They reached the elevator landing and mercilessly pummeled the up button. They slid into the one on standby.
"By the way -"
While looking up at the floor number changing rapidly, Ayano fired the question in a simple way.
"Do you know how to get to the space between the two towers?"
"I don't."
Without the half of a second of pause, Kirika replied immediately. Ayano continued her questioning with a stunned expression.
"Then, what are we going to do?"
"We'll force our way through."
Another immediate reply. Forgetting all her questions, Ayano starred at Kirika's unusually unyielding attitude.
"There's supposed to be at least one window facing the place in question. When comparing it with a broken down building, there's no need worry about a one or two windows or walls getting destroyed."
".........Well, that may be true."
It seems like Kirika was seriously anxious about the collapse of the Tokyo Government Office. Afraid of pointlessly provoking her, Ayano nodded vaguely.
Incidentally, for the sake of getting outside forcefully, it should be noted that beside windows, several locks had been shattered.

"Waaah!?"

At the moment she took a step outside the window, a strong wind got hold of her body. Ayano desperately braced her legs on the ground, her posture changed.

"Dangerous....."

They are at approximately a hundred and fifty meter above ground. If she were to tumble down, there would be literal hell before reaching down.

Feeling a cold sweat on her back, Ayano involuntarily shivered.

"If we were to fall from here, there would be enough time to finish praying before dying."

"Don't say such stupid things and look here."

A cool voice resounded in her ears. When turning around, in the center of the raging wind, Kirika's certainly erect figure was visible.

Ayano pursued Kirika's gaze. The space between the towering towers. At a first glance, nothing seemed suspicious. But -

"Aah, if it's like that, even I can grasp it."

Even for a Enjutsushi's non sharp senses, the unusual phenomenon before her eyes was obvious. The space was flickering in an unstable way.

The barrier concealing Pandemonium seemed unable to restore from the damage Kazuma's wind inflicted upon it.

"What to do? At this point I could hit and hit it with all my force."

"Don't do that."

Without hesitation, Kirika rejected Ayano's proposal.

"If the barrier is blown away, Pandemonium will become completely visible."

"That's true. Then, will you?"

"Yeah. It's fine leaving it to me in this situation."

Letting out words lacking definite confidence or modesty Kirika lightly took a stance.

Unnoticed on the fingers of both palms intersected across her chest four sheets of charms were interposed.

Kirika simultaneously released the four amulet sheets. They soared with a speed unbelievable for some scraps of paper, and suddenly stood still at one point in space, as if there was a transparent barrier there.

The four charms drew a rectangle on that empty space. Gazing sharply at the center of it, Kirika made the Sword Seal - her index and middle finger extended while the other fingers were tightly grasped.

"Rin Pyou Tou Shya Kai Jin Retsu Zai Zen!"

While reciting the nine letter spell, the space before their eyes was cut open the way the right hand Sword Seal was moving. First horizontally, then vertically - and then the moment nine types of lines were carved, the power dwelling in the four amulets was released.

Ghin!

Raising an ear breaking friction, the rectangle inside delimited by the amulets was entirely gouged out.

As if suddenly a window was produced in the empty space, from the hole the outer wall of Pandemonium could be seen.

" - Well done!"

At the performance defying the skillful barrier, Ayano spontaneously praised her from the bottom of her heart.

"But, isn't Hayakuji (trad: the Early Nine Letter) the art of Shugendou?"

Shugendou is a technique called the Nine Letters of Magic consisting of chanting the Nine Letter Spell while using for each letter a correspondent hand seal to purify evil.

The Hayakuji could be called the abridged version of it. Omitting the both hands seal, using only a right hand seal, substituting it for cutting the space nine times.

Comparing it to the proper way of doing it, its effectiveness was lower. Its speed was exceptionally high and could ensure the freedom of one hand. Compared to the Nine Letters, it was more appropriate for battle.

At any rate, it was magic that couldn't be used by Onmyoudou -

- ...Kazuma's words

"I see, that's what he was talking about"

Remembering the words she previously heard from Kazuma, Ayano secretly agreed. This was exactly why she was ostracized by the old ones respecting tradition.

"What are you doing, hurry up!"

When she came to her senses after being called out, Kirika was already passing through the whole opened in the barrier.

It was impossible for Kirika's jutsu to be effective long term. Before being left behind, Ayano followed Kirika in a hurry.

Part 2

The wind blade tore the barrier and exposed the hidden image of Pandemonium in broad daylight.

"Excuse me for disturbing you - or something!"

Kazuma fired one more hit, making a huge hole in the roof and entered Pandemonium from the third floor.

"Well then -"

He turned around and looked over the gloomy room. It looked bedroom-like but except a canopy bed there was not much else.

Unable to trace a presence, Kazuma left the room without reluctance. He opened the door -

"Ooh"

While thinking it would led to the hallway, there was another room. This time it was a completely empty, square room. There was a door in all four directions.

While faintly scowling, he opened a random door. Another square room. Four doors.

"..........."

Pushing his way forward in a straight line, Kazuma opened in succession the other three doors. Without any change, he was greeted by square rooms.
When turning back to the route he came through, he arrived at a children's room crammed with plush toys that he definitely didn't remember crossing.
Looking up at the ceiling, Kazuma murmured.
"Did you tamper with the inside space too? That's dangerous."
Inside Pandemonium, the space structure was changed to a complicated and mysterious dimension maze.
It was possible the tear the space with wind and push his way forward directly but adding external force to this space that became so complicated, it was possible the balance would instantly collapse breaking down Pandemonium itself.
Until he found Ren, he couldn't behave too rashly.
"If only I could find Ren's whereabouts........"
Since the space was distorted, not only he couldn't find Ren's presence, he didn't even understand his present location.
The only thing Kazuma was able to do right now was to believe in that one in a million chance and continue opening the infinite number of doors.

"Well, do you think there's a need for us to knock?"
Standing in front of Pandemonium's entrance, Kirika cracked a joke trying to appease her nervousness.
"Is not really necessary, is it? But if you want me to, I'll do it."
On the other side, already brimming with fighting spirit, Ayano had already thrown away etiquette and the like beyond the equinox.
Standing in front of the massive door, her left foot made one rotation on the axis. And then -
"Excuse me for disturbing you!"
The strong, peerless right-sided roundhouse kick made a dent in the bulky door. The door hinges popped out and the door was blown off with so much force it seemed there was an explosion.
"Well, let's enter."
"Ayano-chan......"
Trying to rebuke Ayano's conduct as that of a, perhaps, fellow woman, Kirika interrupted her own words in the middle of the sentence.
Inside the mansion, she recognized the presence of a person standing still, soundless, in the grand lounge.
As if matching their entrance, the dim lounge was lit up. The light down pouring from the chandelier, accurately shined upon the still shadow.
She was in her late teens, a girl so beautiful she felt out of place. She wore a jet black one piece dress, Gothic Lolita stile, with abundant frills and lace.

Her chestnut color hair was glamorously glittering, her lapis lazuli color eyes staring directly at the two, without blinking.
"....Eeh......."
Although confused by the sudden appearance, tentatively Ayano asked a question.
"You're not Vesalius, right?"
"Yes," the girl nodded blandly.
"I am Lapis. I serve Master Vesalius."
"I see. Then, will you guide us to your master? I have something to discuss with him."
Of course, the *conversation* Ayano had in mind was an aggressive communication using mainly fists.
But, staring with blank eyes at Ayano who was about to roll her sleeves, the girl - Lapis calmly shook her head.
"Master doesn't meet people without an appointment. Please leave."
"Do you expect us to go back with a <<Is that so?>>," Ayano retorted with immediate timing. And then, without hesitation, she stepped forward.
"If you won't show us around we'll search the entire house as I please. Move."
Facing the girl, Ayano met her halfway in a long stride. But Lapis didn't make way.
"Please stop," Lapis pronounced, thoroughly serene.
"If you come any closer, it will be considered hostile behavior and you will be eliminated."
"- Really, how?"
As if answering Ayano's reply, Lapis stepped up to the Western armor decorating the lounge and took the sword carried in those hands.
It was big.
As if disregarding its practical use from the outset, it was a large sword outside norm. The length of the blade was probably a hundred and fifty centimeters. Taking into account the handle, it exceeded two meters. It was bulky enough to cover the girl's waist.
With a solemn sound the scabbard was quickly taken off. The unsheathed blade diffusely reflected the illumination shining prettily.
"........Crystal?" Ayano murmured, intently watching the transparent sword blade that was clearly not steel. True, the gigantic sword that equaled Lapis' stature, all of it was composed of high purity crystal.
Unable to lift it because of its heaviness, the tip of the sword was dragged on the ground. Lapis said:
"Please leave. It is not permitted for uninvited guests to walk around Pandemonium."
She was monotonous as ever but her tone was firm. Ayano immediately understood that it was the last warning.
Pausing her advance, she unsheathed Enraiha. Facing the large crystal sword, she held the scarlet double edged sword clad in a golden flame.

And then, as if declaring war, Ayano took one step forward.
" - !"
Instantly Lapis' image disappeared. In the space of one eye blink, the figure of the girl carrying a large sword moved in front of Ayano.
A swift stepping in and then a slashing attack. The gigantic sword that seemed to mess with the sense of distance, the girl easily swung it downward.
Ayano met that blow with Enraiha. The swinging down crystal sword clashed with the raised scarlet edge.
" - !?"
Lapis had a complete victory in that confrontation.
Her sword, nearly sent flying by that tremendous strength, Ayano instantly altered the angle of the edge and made a slashing attack.
Giving off sparks, the crystal sword slid on Enraiha's blade. Despite changing its trajectory, the huge sword showed no decrease in speed, opening a crater-like hole in the floor.
Putting distance between them, Ayano stared at Lapis with a stiff expression.
"Is.....is this a joke........?"
Her power was unbelievable. Surely, between a sword attack from below and an upward sword attack the added gravity will always favour the one swinging down but this was a totally different level.
The physical strength she felt from this girl right now was clearly different from that of a human.
"Well, it's obvious from that occasion you wold posses something like that," Ayano groaned looking at the girl setting up her large sword half way up the stairway.
It was a sight without a sense of reality. Obstructed by the enormous sword blade, the girl's body was practically invisible.
The master setting up his sword, she was reminded of that optical illusion of a full length invisible edge hidden because of that space without gaps, but this was no illusion.
Purely physical, that gigantic blade is covering most of the girl's body.
"So, what to do?"
Preparing Enraiha, Ayano cautiously examined Lapis' reaction.
She couldn't neglect the girl's bizarre muscle strength but she was even more cautious of that crystal long sword held in that hand.
Being without scratch after exchanging blows with the heat of Enraiha's blade that can thoroughly burn all creation, just by that it was obviously not made of just crystal.
Because it was the weapon of the magician's servant it was perhaps loaded with unusual magical power.
If the effect of it was just a boost of strength there's no problem, but -
During the time Ayano didn't decide how to deal with it, Lapis stated attacking once more.

A soundless blow not only without fighting spirit but even her footsteps didn't make a noise. Leaving behind only the sound of cutting wind, the crystal sword assaulted Ayano.

Without committing the stupidity of stopping a slashing attack equivalent to the blow of castle siege weapons Ayano bent her body and dodged the blade. Also, the continuous sideways sweeping swung at her.

"Sigh - will I manage, one way or another?"

While using only defensive body movements for dodging the attack, Ayano was roughly making sure of Lapis' ability.

She freely handled the large sword to levels unrivaled by human beings but it seemed simple physical strength.

Certainly, her speed and might were terrific but for the sake of yielding that enormous mass her swordsmanship was limited and couldn't defy the law of inertia.

That was opportunity enough to strike.

Sharpening her reflexes, she waited for her chance while bearing nothing but evasion.

That opportunity arrived unexpectedly early.

Becoming irritated by the lack of contact, Lapis made an extremely long sweeping stroke.

Stepping in closely with all her strength, she mowed down the large sword with her right arm. That offensive made a maximum reach but naturally the time interval for dodging it was also large.

Ayano evaded that blow with a back step and stepped into Lapis' territory when the crystal blade passed her.

Unable to suppress the recoil of the swing the crystal sword almost flew close to Lapis' back. While in that posture, no matter how much transcendental physical strength the girl had, she couldn't slash back in time.

"Whaa?"

But, much more quickly than Ayano expected, Lapis unleashed the pursuit. Moreover, from the same right side as last time.

Crossing over the girl's back, the large sword was transferred from her right to her left hand and without slashing from the opposite direction from the first attack it made one more revolution and fired the same attack a second time.

Leaving aside the consecutive attack made by the full body rotation, Ayano wasn't able to predict her using that enormous sword like a knife.

She barely managed to catch that blow with Enraiha but, of course, she didn't manage to stop it. Even if Enraiha was safe her arm was about to break.

Naturally Ayano flew back, let loose by the impact.

Although blown away she reorganized her stance in mid-air and neatly landed on the wall with her legs.

By the time she landed on the floor, Lapis was already holding the huge sword aloft. The gigantic sword blade secretly disappeared in the girl's body.
As if she could return it on a scabbard on her back, an extreme pose.
While having a fiercely unpleasant presentiment, Ayano raised Enraiha overhead. Almost simultaneously, Lapis swung down the large sword.
From the crystal sword blade, an intense shock-wave was released.
"Y.......ouu......!"
Enraiha's blade swung downward one beat later met the imminent shock-wave. Cleaving it in two, the shock-wave flew past Ayano on both sides and opened two large holes on the wall behind her.
"......Unbelievable, huh?" Groaned Ayano, letting out a rough breath.
That physical ability was not a laughing matter. The blow just now didn't even have magic. The sword's pointed end exceeded speed of sound and created a genuinely physical shock-wave.
"That's one great animal strength."
"..........."
Lapis was silent. Expressionless like a puppet, from the beginning of the fight up until now, she didn't slightly waver once.
Without showing any sign of unrest as all her attacks were blocked, without emotion or maybe because she had confidence her performance was superior.
"Don't get carried away!"
With one shout, Ayano became aggressive. Reducing the distance between the two by breaking into extreme speed, she swung Enraiha downward head on.
Lapis carelessly rose the crystal sword overhead, and repelled the slash. Next it was aimed to her torso but just by slightly changing the angle she defended.
Clearly, the girl mastered the handling of the enormous sword. The length of the sword blade, its thickness, was effectively used, handling the opponent's attack with a minimum of movement.
"Kuu....."
Worn out by the attack, Ayano took a tiny breath and backed off. Without missing that break, Lapis shortened the distance quickly.
"Kyaaa!"
In only a moment, not quick enough, Ayano was blown away. But this was what Ayano planned.
Brandishing Enraiha in midair, Ayano shouts:
"If you can block this, I'd like to see you try!"
The blade swung downward, releasing a fireball. Generating in succession three plasma spheres, they struck Lapis all at once.
Lapis looked up at the super hot cluster of flames drawing near indifferently. Without hesitation, she raised the crystal sword and swept it sideways.

The flash that appeared accurately sliced the three fireballs. Immediately following, they were extinguished without trace.
"- Wha?"
The instant her shocked, wide opened eyes perceived the crystal long sword, Ayao understood that mechanism.
The sword blade that was transparent, had been tainted red.
"It was absorbed !?"
Lapis yielded the crimson long sword on a grand scale. The red crystal glittered and released a crimson flame from the blade.
Surrounding Ayano, a five meter diameter space was turned to hell.
" - Tch, for an Enjutsushi such a move is -"
It seems she knew it couldn't be effective. By the time Ayano was scattering the blaze fully irritated, Lapis imminently approached Ayano, the transparent again long sword raised overhead.
"Crap."
Ayano avoided the blade pressed right before her eyes by bending forward and with that momentum put distance between them with a forward somersault.
As a feint she released a fireball in order to get up but as expected it was absorbed by the projected crystal blade.
"I'm beaten by this......" Ayano murmured looking at that stance without openings.
It seems like Lapis wasn't a Jutsushi or maybe a Jutsushi that manipulates one's flesh and didn't have any sort of offensive magic.
But, the girl was clearly an expert at anti-Jutsushi combat. She blocked long distance magical attacks with the crystal blade and by fighting close combat she didn't allow one the spare time for using magic, she showed the ultimate level of perfection at this kind of strategy.
"What to do....?"
"Surprisingly, you seem to have a hard time. Are you perhaps going to lose?"
While seriously thinking, a calm question as if it were someone else's problem reached her ears. Involuntarily Ayano was filled with a thirst to kill, and glared at her companion posing spectator from a distant place.
"Why the fuck are you so relaxed? How about backing me a little, even if it's a sham?"
Kirika irresponsibility shrugged her shoulders, warding off Ayano's protest.
"Don't say such nonsense. It's impossible to try thrusting myself in the neighboring of such high speed combat, right?"
"But, Kazuma would -"
Stopping mid-sentence, Ayano realized her blunder.
Although there was no need to say anymore, Kirika stressed the point as if trying to make sure.
"Don't you think it's unreasonable to force mankind to Kazuma's level?"
"Right. That was my mistake."

Ayano frankly admitted her fault.
If it's Kazuma, no matter how fast or complex were Ayano to move, he can flawlessly support her with a nonchalant air.
But, just how much transcendental skill does that require, Ayano knows it better than anyone else.
In any case, she is now fighting at ultra high speed where the positions are mutually exchanged at instant intervals.
If an inferior Jutsushi were to interfere, far from support it's not unlikely she would destroy her ally.
Not just the supporter's movement, but perfectly reading the movement of the rival she is facing, holding the entire battlefield on the palm of his hand, doing that from the first time, the deed of assisting close combat almost intertwined, that becomes an unreasonable deed.
It's possible Kirika was a first class Onmyouji but that is after all only first class.
She spontaneously shouted letting anger take it's natural course but if Kirika were to intervene Ayano would be troubled all the more.
Even under normal circumstances fighting an enemy was difficult. She has no room to pay attention even to her back.
At such times, only at such times, she wanted to be close to Kazuma.
If Kazuma were to defend her back, she can fight without concern.
If it's Kazuma, he can adjust the stage and make her feel good in order to fight at full power.
"Ah, enough already! It's all his fault for not being here!"
Ayano set up Enraiha and retorted with a scream, venting her propensity for anger.

Part 3

Before he knew it, Ren was standing by himself in a dim, huge room.
No - he was not alone
There was one more person.
At the boundary between very dim light and pitch darkness, at a distance he could just barely confirm it by sight, someone was sitting calmly.
Eliminating time to look closely, Ren threw a fireball high in the sky. The white light shining out far and wide lit up the spacious room like broad daylight.
As if opening a hundred people ball, the empty room was grand to that extent. But, only two people were there right now.
Ren and, the person seated on an extravagant chair on the seat of honor on the innermost part of the saloon.
"In my opinion -"
The personage assuming that position started talking with an expression containing a smile. It was a voice he heard somewhere before.
The voice of the man that took him out from Tokyo Government Office.

"Your action is inelegant. If illumination is necessary I will provide it. Please erase that primitive lamp about to scorch the ceiling."

Matching the man's words, the great number of chandeliers hanging from the ceiling turned on all at once.

Ren extinguished the flame that became unnecessary, and stared scrutinizing at the whole man.

Platinum blond long hair. A deep crimson mantle wore on top of a black suit. The face was covered with a plain mask.

His appearance was just like it was explained. Ren inquired directly.

"Are you Vesalius?"

"When you're asking for a person's name, isn't it etiquette to call yourself first?"

Ren glared at the man closing hie eyes partly. Spontaneously his back dropped, his knee bent, taking a combat posture.

Inside the mask, the man seemed to laugh.

"Kannagi's youngest child, I heard you are a gentle child who dislikes conflict but that must have been some metaphor, right?"

"I have no idea," Ren repelled unfeeling.

"At least, I don't think there is a need to be mannered towards you."

"Ha ha, how cold."

Laughing once more, the man suddenly stood up.

"Whatever. I am certainly the proprietor of Pandemonium, Vesalius. And you are Kannagi Ren. Shall we advance the conversation now that we both know the other's identity?"

The man - Vesalius made a step forward with his right leg and with a pompous gesture swiped his mantle to the back. As if tempting, he raised his right palm, forward.

"Welcome to the Pandemonium, Chosen One. Your power has been acknowledged and deemed suitable for progressing even more. Do you wish a class change?"

"I don't!" Replied Ren immediately point blank.

"- Well, since it's you, you would answer that way."

Vesalius shrugged his shoulders bored-looking, dropping his hand.

"The other people agreed to it extremely happily."

"Why such a thing - no, the reason is inconsequential. Stop doing such things."

"I can't do that."

This time Vesalius replied immediately.

"This experiment took a lot of labor in itself. I can't stop it because a child's complaint makes noise."

"Experiment - ?"

"That's right, an experiment. For the sake of it I distributed power to those intellectually impaired young people. In no way does it mean I'm messing around trying to convert to reality the world of TV games."

Ren didn't intend to ask about the purpose of that experiment. As one would expect, they wouldn't chat to that extent and there's no point in knowing.
No matter the reason, this sort of act couldn't be overlooked.
"You're giving off a pretty violent presence, boy ~"
Seeing through Ren's decision, a faint wry smile oozed from Vesalius' voice. But, without taking a stance to face the attack, he sat down on the chair for a second time.
"A fighting scene is my weak point. If I were to fight against an Enjutsushi, I would be killed in three seconds. That is being modest."
"Then -"
"I have an attendant specialized in combat but now is all out for the sake of eliminating another intruder."
"Another intruder ~"
"Do you want to see?"
Vesalius lightly brought up his left hand. That movement was a sigh, a screen was produced in the air projecting two girls fighting each other.
Among them, there was a girl Ren recognized by sight.
"Nee-sama!"
"That's right. A direct descendant of Kannagi just like you, Miss Kannagi Ayano. By the way, the other one, my subordinate, is called Lapis. She is thoroughly trained in anti-Jutsu combat. Even if the opponent is a direct descendant of Kannagi, she won't lose."
"You....."
"Aah, it's not just her."
Raising this time his right hand, Vesalius produced one more screen in the air. What was reflected there -
"Nii-sama!"
"Yagami Kazuma. His former name is Kannagi Kazuma. They both came here in order to save you. You're quite loved aren't you, boy?"
Inside the screen Kazuma was exploring the mansion irritated. But his manner of walking felt exactly random and didn't seem to have a purpose.
Since his brother was an excellent Fujutsushi, there was no need to use his legs to this extent inside the mansion -
As if reading Ren's question, Vesalius announced in a tone full of composure.
"The section he trespass through became a dimension maze replacing the warped space. He can't search it using wind"
"Nii-sama's wind can tear that space itself!"
"True."
Vesalius agreed to Ren's instant objection without hint of disturbance.
"But, if he were to tear down the space that became twisted to this extent, the balance will instantly crumble and maybe Pandemonium will collapse, that's what he's thinking. In reality, the structure is not that poorly built."

From inside the mask, the lingering memory of scorn leaked out. Sneering at Kazuma continuing his pointless endeavor, Vesalius' shoulders trembled slightly.
"Therefore, he won't choose such a forced action. If he were by himself he wouldn't hesitate but you are here. That man's - our detestable bitter enemy's most important person, you."
" - !?"
Although wearing a mask, it couldn't possibly conceal the hatred and intent to kill. Flooded in the criminal intent gushing out from he man's hole body, Ren was terrified.
".......Is Nii-sama, your objective.......?"
"No, that's an additional gain."
Smoothly recovering his serenity, Vesalius answered.
"It was determined the experiment would be most pertinent if done here. I was informed he would be here but I don't have that much time to spare for someone hated."
"..........."
Seeing Vesalius answer thoroughly indifferent, Ren was overpowered.
It was scary beyond reason.
While seeming rational, this was was different at some fundamental level.
Something, he couldn't quite express it, was different. A mutually exclusive definite something. To the extent he couldn't put up with breathing the same air as him.
But even so, he was in front of the enemy ringleader. Running away wasn't permitted. There was nobody who could help him.
- He had no choice but to do it by himself.
"In short, what are you trying to say?"
Hardening his resolution to confront Vesalius, Ren asked with a face feigning serenity.
"Do you plan to take Nii-sama and Nee-sama hostage? If that's the case, it's pointless. Nee-sama wouldn't lose to the likes of your servant. Even Nii-sama won't be trapped in the maze forever. It's quite the opposite, the fact that those two could become a burden to me is nothing but a comical story!"
"Humph, certainly."
Vesalius consented, not taken aback but frank.
"I don't know about Kannagi Ayano but Yagami Kazuma - that man with a lack of common sense in all aspects can't be sealed by something like a dimension maze. That's quite a plausible argument."
"Then, what is that you're aiming at?"
"Hmmm -"
As of thinking over it carefully or maybe trying to dodge, Vesalius tilted his head to the side in doubt. Just like <<The Fire Leader>> Takamatsu Kyoshi said, he was a very theatrical man.
" - The production of a play, maybe?"
"What?"

"I said, the production of a play. With what sort of timing will the three of you be reunited under one roof, I'm waiting for the most effective *<<chance>>*"

"To.......to what end?"

"How to elaborate this, huh?" Stated Vesalius as a matter of course.

"The arrival of the protagonists after discovering the wicked magician's hiding place. All three separated, caught into vicious traps while rushing in, each encountering a formidable enemy. To come together in this burning situation without any sort of drama, to climax will be lacking. Wouldn't you doubt my sense even more?"

"I don't care about such things!" Shouted Ren unable to bear it any longer. But Vesalius' determination didn't waver.

"I can't allow such a thing. This setting needs drama unconditionally. For example, the moment Lapis beheads Miss Kannagi Ayano, Yagami Kazuma appears and in that state -"

"That's impossible!"

"Is that so? You are underestimating Lapis' ability. That could be called the ultimate form of a <<Jutsushi Killer>>. Even if Yagami is sealed in the dimension maze -"

His proud words interrupted mid-way, Vesalius stared at the screen projecting Kazuma. Inside the screen, Kazuma was also looking hard at Vesalius.

"- Are you, there?"

A dry voice reached Ren's ear. Of course Vesalius' too.

"Ridiculous....."

Vesalius' voice, full of composure until now, looked worried for the first time.

Before his eyes, he stares at the chilly glance beyond the screen.

"Ridiculous!"

Vesalius immediately tried to eliminate the crystal. But, faster that that.

"Ren!"

From inside the crystal, Kazuma shouts.

"If you're there, call my name! I'll definitely find where you are! Ren - "

"Nii-sama!"

No doubt came to his mind. Believing he will reach without fail, Ren shouts as loudly as possible.

"I'm here! Nii-sama!"

"I won't let you!"

While shouting, Vesalius grasped tightly his right hand. As if crushing the crystal floating in mid-air with that hand.

But, slightly late, from inside, the crystal was sliced in a straight line. The sounds of stretched barriers smashed up over and over again, played and reverberated between the hard space.

"......What unbelievable behavior you have."

Gazing at the man jumping out of the crystal, Vesalius groaned as if mourning.
"More than severing the space, your search by way of wind was supposed to be sealed. How did you do something so special?"
"It's not particularly special. I just followed the path you made," replied Kazuma as a matter of course.
"Should I say, sorry for the trouble I put you through?"
"You bastard.........."
The pair of eyes inside the mask, glared at Kazuma full of hate. But lightly warding that off, Kazuma turned his face toward Ren.
"Yo, Ren. Are you unhurt?"
"Ah, yes. I'm sorry for making you worry."
"No, if I wouldn't have heard your voice, perhaps i would have been delayed a little longer"
While brushing gently Ren's head, rushing over, Kazuma asked as if continuing the conversation.
"So, are you Vesalius?"
"Yes, you can call me that."
"Heee......"
While showing a frivolous broad grin, Kazuma focused on the masked man. Vesalius too, quietly stared back at Kazuma through the expressionless mask.
At a first glance they looked as if confronting each other in an indifferent manner. But, even Ren could clearly see the transmitted violent emotion on the verge of explosion boiling inside.
" Does my brother also know Vesalius?"
our detestable bitter enemy
Vesalius referred like that to Kazuma. Exactly as stated, he included as much hate as possible.
What sort of connection is between the two, truthfully he was scared of knowing.
In front of Ren, catching his breath and watching them attentively, Kazuma got the ball rolling playing the fool.
"Your taste is surprisingly unusual. What's with the crazed appearance, Bernhardt Rhodes?"
"- Eh?"
"- Humph"
At the shocking accusation, he covered the surprised groan with an displeased sigh.
Confused Ren shifted his attention on the man calling himself Vesalius but without showing any sigh of disturbance, the masked man stared back at Kazuma coolly.
"Can you not make such an elated face? I wasn't particularly hiding it. This resemblance is one part of the play production."

"I see. Then, to what purpose did you bring Ren here? Since I finally overlooked your life, weren't you supposed to use it in a more meaningful manner?"
"Don't get cocky, youngster," Vesalius coldly announced without trace of provocation.
"You'd better understand a bastard like you managed to live this long because we ignored you as something trifle. If we were serious, a bastard like you -"
"Ha ha ha, well, I didn't notice that," Kazuma laughed with an extremely *you're rubbing me the wrong way* expression.
"So, who the fuck is supposed to kill me when **I** butchered your master, huh?"
With the face of an arrogant villain holding his head high, at the time he loudly declared so -
The wall behind was blown off as if exploding and two shadows tumbled in.

Part 4

"Daaaah!"
Dodging the low blade poke from above, Ayano aimed at Lapis' undefended torso.
But earlier than the blade Lapis' torso already disappeared. Using the crystal long sword as a fulcrum, she pulled herself up in that manner raising her body and evading in the air.
Precisely because the weapon she yielded was by far heavier her body weight that risky undertaking with a touch of acrobatics was possible.
"I'm not letting you escape!"
Ayano threw a fireball at Lapis trying to put distance between them. Just as until now, the crystal blade absorbed the fireball together with its caloric value. The crystal blade was dyed red.
"Once more!"
Not caring about it, Ayano released a second blaze. The crimson crystal colored deeper as it soaked in the blaze and finally changed to a deep crimson as if it was fresh blood.
"This is the last one!"



Without giving the flame absorbing sword blade the time to release it, for the third time and this time without mistake using all her power, Ayano hit into it golden flames.
The blade already near its flame absorption limit didn't have enough reserve power to receive the third strike.
The moment the golden flame came into contact with the blade, it exploded while preserving almost all caloric value.
Together with the detonation, Lapis was blown off splendidly.
Her body, apparently slim and elegant, crashed into the wall, smashed the wall and without reducing its momentum, disappeared on the other side of it.
"You won't get away!"
Mercilessly, Ayano fired a plasma sphere in pursuit. Unable to visually confirm the target the blow was hit at random but there's no problem opening a hole in the wall for the sake of the important objective.
Rather than a hole, climbing over the 80% destroyed wall Ayano stepped in the next room chasing Lapis.
Surprisingly Lapis didn't have any visible wounds. Her clothes weren't significantly disordered, and finally scorched by the flames her expression was cool-looking and didn't seemed to appear to have just been blown off more than ten meters.
But -
"I win!"
One moment later, just by clashing the blades Ayano was convinced of victory.
She already couldn't feel that absurd vitality. As expected, she didn't come out unscathed after receiving that blow. Her movement was greatly dulled.
During the explosion the crystal blade recovered its transparency but using Enjutsu is no longer required.
In the state Lapis is right now, she can be defeated only by fencing. Ayano concluded so, calmly.
"That woman is OK. What's left - "
Looking to her side, she confirmed three people at the edge of her field of vision. The previous visitors, who were apparently in this room from the beginning.
Two of those faces were familiar.
Kazuma and Ren and a masked man - the one she heard about, Vesalius.
Kazuma rescued Ren and confronted the enemy to kill which was the same as having won already.
Leaving Vesalius to Kazuma, Ayano focused her awareness on Lapis.
"You're finished"
Although feebly staggering but even so wielding the sword expressionless, Lapis was sent flying by Ayano's one blow.
The damage seemed larger than expected. That physical ability that was overwhelming was utterly spent without trace.

The large sword unable to be supported by those frail arms fell to the floor with a dull, heavy sound.
In order to settle this in one go Ayano ran. She faced the girl standing rock still brandishing Enraiha and then -
" - !?"
Feeling an intense thirst for blood from her flank, Ayano jumped on the spur of the moment. A wind blade ran right before her eyes.
If she wouldn't have recognized and plunge into she was certain it was timed for a fatal would.
"Kazuma!? Where the fuck are you aiming - "
Starting a say an inappropriate complaint, Ayano frowned puzzled.
In daze, simply in a daze Kazuma gazed at Lapis. Ayano's complaint clearly didn't reach his ears. It seems he didn't even noticed he almost killed Ayano by accident.
His trembling lips squeezed out a small, grazed voice.
"Tsoi.....Rin........"
"Eh?"
She remembered hearing that name. Yes, not nearly one hour ago.
"Tsoi Rin's eyes were green - "
As if yearning for her, as if caressing her, Kazuma whispered a woman's name.
But clearly the eyes of the girl calling herself Lapis were lapis lazuli blue. As if trying to confirm it once again, Ayano witnessed another unexpected thing.
Lapis too stared at Kazuma intently. Not a trace of her expressionless doll-like appearance from the middle of the battle. Her wet pupils shook as if she was about to break down crying at any moment.
"But, she doesn't seem happy to meet him. Loneliness? Sadness? It's different, she's more - "
Experiencing a feeling similar to alienation at the couple staring at each other, Ayano couldn't take her eyes off them.
Fixing each other and each other only with a hot gaze. A universe complete with just the two of them. Impossible for other people to disturb even if they tried, that kind of atmosphere.
" - Lapis, come here"
But that single word, unbearably uncomfortable from an outsider, destroyed the mood.
At the same time Bernhardt's order was handed down, Lapis regained her inhuman expression.
"Yes, Master"
Lapis replied shortly, turned her back to them without hesitation and started walking but for some reason Ayano didn't chase after her. She had no choice but to watch over that silhouette picking up the large sword fallen down on her way and meeting Bernhardt halfway at her wit's end.
"............................hey"

Several seconds after the girl tempered her master's bad mood sitting behind him - Kazuma finally opened his mouth. His tone seemed to desperately try to crush something to death.
"What?"
In a contrastive light voice Bernhardt asked. It was as if he completely didn't feel the anger dwelling in Kazuma's voice.
".........There's a lot I want to ask but.....enough, just die"
Literally spitting out that verdict, Kazuma released a wind blade.
But the certain kill blow vanished in front of the crystal blade. Lapis jumped in front of Bernhardt and protected her master using her body.
".........tch"
In front of the girl setting up her sword, Kazuma clearly backed off feeling clearly shaken.
Inside the mask, Bernhardt laughed.
"Have I done something to hurt your feelings?"
Unnaturally tilting his head to the side, Bernhardt asked. As if making fun of him, as if flipping.
"I made you reunite with your dead sweetheart. Aren't you supposed to be grateful?"
"Fuck you......!", Kazuma groaned, his voice trembling with fury.
"Did you thing that sham imitating merely for form's sake will become your trump card? Don't fuck with me Bernhardt!"
"Hey, hey"
Shaking his head in lamentation, Bernhardt sighed.
"A sham, you say? A sham! You, the world's greatest Fujutsushi, you, able to understand all creation via wind, are you calling her a sham just because of her outward appearance! *Look* better! The girl's true nature - "
"Be silent", Kazuma said dreadfully cold.
But that tone was clearly different from usual.
It had no composure.
In front of that implausible reality of Kazuma losing the mental battle, Ayano was frightened from the bottom of her heart.
Although that spectacle was right before her eyes, she still couldn't believe it.
The man called Kazuma is different from one who is only strong.
Even though he is standing in front of a stronger opponent, Kazuma will never waver. He won't falter. Putting on a fearless smile he will fight and finally snatch away the victory.
The man Ayano wanted for her partner was that man. And yet -
"It's impossible to revive Tsoi Rin, right......?"
The man she believed solid like a rock, was swaying in insecurity. His voice trembled, his face distorted in sorrow.
"You stole everything......her body, her soul, she was eaten by a devil without leaving anything behind! She's nowhere to be found! It's impossible

for her to be born again! No matter what Jutsu you use, she cannot be restored to life!"
"I know"
Bernhard responded dispassionate at that scream full of grief.
"I know that. Because at that time, four years ago, I was also there"
" - What, was it like that", Kazuma murmured, placing an fierce intent to kill in his gaze.
If there was a man who lost all hope, at the time of meeting the person who robbed him of everything maybe he would murmur so,
If there was a man who decided the purpose of his life was to kill people in order to carry out his revenge, he would laugh with this kind of voice.
If there was a man who, despite being alive gave up on being alive and wishing for a future, maybe he would howl with this kind of voice.
Like the wind blowing through a parched desert, an empty voice.
"I didn't know. Because at that time, I saw no one else but him. If I knew, I would have killed you together with him........"
The finger warped like a hook controlled the wind.
Bernhardt controlled his strained laugh seeing Kazuma about to release a blow made up of killing intent and madness.
"Well, hear me out. At that time I was certainly in that place. For this reason, I was able to find something. The last thought left from that girl called Tsoi Rin on the verge of death"
"Wh...at.......?"
"Something like a residual thought, also called a lost emotion. I picked up the thought etched in that space and made Lapis from the core of it. You understand?"
After a short silence, Kazuma spit out with an unpleasant manner of speaking.
"In other words an imitation, right"
"It's not something so deplorable"
As if admonishing a pupil with bad scores, Bernhardt spoke.
"Will you discard the last thought of the girl you once loved as a *<<sham>>*? Do you have nothing to say to the girl you weren't able to protect because of your powerlessness?"
"........say no more.......", retorted Kazuma with a groan but his tone was terribly frail.
Bernhardt sneered at Kazuma's best effort and tenderly embraced Lapis' shoulders.
"That's fine. I will hear at another time in what way will you fulfill your love for Miss Tsoi Rin. Today it's time to part ways"
"Do you think you can run away?"
Kazuma raised his voice but Bernhardt's composure didn't crumble. Showing Lapis like an artist who displays his best work, he declared proudly.
"I handed out power to the foolish young people of this country. So, what reason would I have not to bestow it on Lapis, my servant?"

" - tch!"
Those words gave a strong shock even to the people left behind to this point.
Especially for Ayano, who realized Lapis' power first hand it was a sentence she didn't want to believe in.
Because the girl she fought so hard against even had a hidden ability.
"Lapis' class is <<The Demon Swordsman>>. Come now, show them your power"
"Yes, Master"
Responding blandly, Lapis put strength into the hand gripping the long sword. The crystal blade released a white light from inside and -
"Wh- What - !?"
Ayano raised a cry of surprise. Behind Lapis, the illusion of a transparent woman emerged.
Beautiful and solemn, an enormous illusion giving the impression of a goddess. That thing whose head exceeded one meter by itself surrounded Lapis' arms as if embracing her closely and grabbed the crystal long sword the girl was holding.
Using the real sword as a core, an illusionary large sword was molded. The enormous blade suitable for the enormous vision pierced through the hall's wall. It grew interminably.
"Pandemonium lost its purpose. Destroy everything"
"Yes, Master"
According to the master's command, Lapis swung downward the large sword in a straight line. And then, matching the girl's movement the illusion swung the imaginary sword.
" - tch!"
The phantom blade passed through where Kazuma's arm was before he promptly jumped. The large sword who wasn't supposed to exist in reality, tore down the ceiling, blast away the walls, pulverised the floor, turned the blade point right under and became still.
The fracture line was vertical; the guest room cut half way round. It was the result brought by just one sword swing, that may be interesting to mention but -
"Only this?", coughed Ayano as if she lost interest.
Looking at Lapis, in a posture kneeling down in one knee, her sword piercing the floor, the girl didn't look about to make the next move. Even the background illusion disappeared unnoticed.
While thinking it wasn't a bid deal in proportion to the flashy directing, that moment -
" - Eh?"
A sinister creak reached her ears.
She didn't know where it came from and what made it but she clearly understood it was lethal, that sound.

Stronger and closer, the creak relentlessly continued. Some kind of serious crushing sound also joined in -

"Kyaaa!?"

Abruptly, a shock bursting out from right under attacked them. The tremor was violent enough to make one believe it was a near-field earthquake. And then, a floating sensation as if gravity disappeared -

"Wh........what is..........eeh?"

Recovering from the unexpected crash, Ayano looked up at Lapis in blank amazement. Before she knew, the space between the floor she stood on and the girl rose nearly two meters in height.

Close to her were Kazuma, Ren and Kirika. On the other side were Bernhardt and Lapis.

Was this neat separation of friends and enemies an accident or maybe -

"But, why this way then ?"

Ayano's gaze wandered about the surroundings. She instantly discovered the reason.

The saloon was vertically slipping off. In accordance with the long sword's cleaving path, the saloon was divided right in half. And then, while the balance crumbled, it produced a longitudinal dislocation.

The one sliced wasn't just the guest room. That phantom sword probably bisected the entire Pandemonium.

" - Huh, just wait a second"

Thinking that far, Ayano realized a frightening truth.

From what it was seem from the outside Pandemonium was a three stores building. If everything was cut from the first floor to the roof, that blade lightly stretched more than ten meters. And then Lapis swung that sword until directly below. Since the point if the sword sunk into the floor.

"That blow, just how far did it slice?"

As if verifying Ayano's uneasiness, the tremor underneath her feet increased violently. What was called *underfoot*, *the ground* that supported Pandemonium's mass, in other words -

The omen of caving in came from above. From lovely fragments of ceiling to stones and lumber weighting a ton, roughly every piece that composed the mansion came down, having lost its support.

But, pretending not to recognize that spectacle of destruction, Bernhardt made a refined bow.

"Well then, that's all for today. If the destiny will allow, let's meet again"

"Wait......."

"It's pointless"

Restraining the powerless Kazuma, Bernhardt avoided him indifferent.

Not impossible but pointless

"The way you are right now, you can't do anything against Lapis"

"If you find the answer, come again. You will have a heartfelt reception"

The master of the crumbling Pandemonium exaggeratedly waved his mantle with a thud and wrapped Lapis inside it.

Ant then - he disappeared.
"Aah - "
Even more that the skillfulness of that Jutsu, the timing was exquisite. While receiving the attention of all members, displaying an excellent skill while none hindered, the couple disappeared.
There was no way of searching for their destination.

Standing stock still in the middle of the crumbling Pandemonium, Kazuma continued glaring at the space Bernhardt disappeared from.
His pupils coated in hatred, hallucinating maybe about the masked man in the downpour of debris, he wasn't aware of the crisis he was presently facing.
" Kazuma ! It's dangerous! If you don't hurry up - "
Without realizing the fact that Ayano was leading him by the hand with a desperate expression, he glared at the empty sky tightly grasping his fists.
"Bernhard - "
Through the gap between his clench teeth, he wrings out the name of that hateful enemy.
Entrusting that overflowing fury to that name, he shouted until his voice became hoarse.
"Bernhardt!!!!!"'
The collapse of the bisected Tokyo Metropolitan Tower, unable to bear that weight, happened immediately after.

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References

1. ↑ Memorization technique based on repetition.
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